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By

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## **White Principals' Perceptions of Race**

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**White Principals' Perceptions of Race**  
**by**  
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**Treatise**

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Finally, as we all travel on our life journey, we can be a negative force in the world, stand by and indifferently watch injustice and inequity, or we can do something to make our life, the United States and the World a better, more just place. Be the change you want!

# **White Principals' Perceptions of Race**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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The history of the public school system in the United States is wrought with examples of marginalized groups and inequities (DuBois, 1989; Woodson, 1933). Public schools throughout the United States are still struggling to equitably meet the needs of all students. Students of color and students from marginalized groups continue to find the public school system difficult to successfully navigate and racially biased educational gaps are still prevalent. These struggles are compounded by the increasing percentages of students of color in our public schools today. Utilizing critical theory as the theoretical underpinning and qualitative interview methodologies, this study examined the perceptions five White principals held on race and racism. These five White school leaders were current elementary or middle school principals from a large racially diverse school district in the southern United States. The critical examination of these White school leader's perceptions of race and racism yielded six themes: 1.) The White principals utilized deficit thinking. 2.) The White principals employed racial erasure and colorblindness. 3.) The White principals did not recognize Whiteness. 4.) The White principals did not understand systematic and institutional racism. 5.) The White principals were reluctant to address racial issues. 6.) The White principals demonstrated a nascent level of White racial identity. These findings invoked a need to better prepare our White public school leaders for the increasingly diverse student populations they serve. If White school leaders are to effectively address the racially biased outcomes in our public schools today they must develop a greater White racial identity. Formal training and instruction for White school leaders around race and racism is lacking and must be

reconsidered and improved. Principal preparation programs in the United States must begin to weave discussions of race and racism into and throughout their programs to better address this profound knowledge gap. In order to effectively address racism and racial equity within our public school system White principals must stand up, recognize, and address race.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction to Study**

#### *Background*

The history of the public school system in the United States is wrought with examples of marginalized groups and inequities (DuBois, 1989; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Woodson, 1933). Public schools throughout the United States are still struggling to equitably meet the needs of minority and disadvantaged students. These struggles are compounded by the increasing percentages of minority students in public schools today. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2010) shows that the percentage of minority students in public schools in the United States increased from 21% in 1972 to 44% in 2008. From 1972 to 2008, White students in public school across the United States decreased from 78% to 55.5%, while at the same time the Hispanic student group grew from 6% to 21.7%, Black students increased slightly from 14.8% to 15.5%. Asian and all other or mixed ethnicity groups grew from less than 1% to account for 7.3% of the population in 2008 (NCES, 2010). Students from marginalized groups are finding the public school system difficult to successfully navigate and achievement gaps<sup>1</sup> and educational gaps are still prevalent.

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<sup>1</sup> Educators commonly use the term “achievement gap” to refer to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students, particularly the differences in standardized achievement tests scores between White students and students of color. For the purposes of this study and clarity, the score gaps between racial groups on standardized achievement tests will be called achievement test gaps and the gaps between racial groups in the multitude of other educational system indicators, like course selection, grades, teacher quality, graduation rates, college-going and college-completion rates, and drop-out rates, will collectively be called educational gaps

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, there is a renewed focus on accountability and the academic achievement of the specific sub-groups on high-stakes tests. It is thought that an emphasis on accountability and increased rigor will ultimately close the persistent achievement test gaps between students of color and their White counterparts in the United States. Yet, even with this renewed focus and increased dialogue about the achievement test gap, students of color still lag significantly behind their White counterparts on achievement tests (College Board, 1999; Ferguson, 2002; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg & Dion, 2005a, 2005b; Walker & Bridgeman, 2008). Although there are many factors that may affect these prevalent achievement test gaps, many still believe the fault lies primarily with the students of color themselves. However, what if the problems do not reside with the students of color and what if racial and institutional biases within the public school system are a factor?

Despite the current demographic changes in the United States students in public schools are still taught primarily by White teachers in schools operated primarily by White school leaders (NCES, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2013). During the 2008-09 school year, 83.5% of the teachers (NCES, 2009b) and 82.3% of the principals (NCES, 2009a) in public schools across the United States were White. Thus, the current plight and future academic success of students of color rests significantly with White teachers and White administrators. Since the perceptions, preconceptions and beliefs that a person holds can affect both their expectations (Hobson-Powell & Hobson, 1996; Tompkins & Boor, 1980; Nash, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1970) and initial behaviors (Amodio & Devine, 2006; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996), White

educators' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes play a role in the education of students of color. Thus, a deeper examination of the perceptions White educators hold about race and their students of color could provide valuable insights regarding explanations for the numerous educational gaps in today's public schools.

This chapter will introduce the topic and design of this research project. It will lay the foundation and rationale for the research and present the importance of making this inquiry into the perceptions White principals hold about race and students of color.

## **Statement of Problem and Rationale for the Study**

### *Era of Accountability*

The United States has entered another “new” era in education with the passage of No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. This act was passed, in part, to address the closure of the achievement gap between “disadvantaged and minority students and their peers” (No Child Left Behind, 2001). Due to NCLB’s fixation on high-stakes testing, the Act was most concerned with the achievement test gap and not the multitude of other educational indicators. The Act mandated schools to close the achievement test gap and educate all students with equity. However, the standardized test achievement gap between White students and students of color as well as other racial inequities within the public school institutions are still prevalent today. Research has shown that students of color are performing at lower levels on standardized tests (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; College Board, 1999, 2009; Ferguson, 2002; Kobrin, Sathy, & Shaw, 2007; Loveless, 2012; Marayuma, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010, 2003; Noguera, 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg & Dion, 2005a, 2005b; Walker & Bridgeman, 2008), are



over-represented in special education and lower level classes (Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Reglins, 1992; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994; Skiba et al., 2008;), are under-represented in gifted and talented programs, college track and higher level classes (Ford, 2006, 1996; Ogbu, 1994; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994), are educated in schools with fewer resources (Kozol, 1991; Lee, 2004), are more likely to be expelled or suspended (Gordon, Painan & Keleher, 2000), are more likely to drop-out (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009), are scoring lower on college entrance exams (College Board, 2009; Maruyama, 2003), are seeking entrance into colleges and universities less frequently, enrolling less and earning fewer degrees (Lui, 2011; Maruyama, 2003), and are often being taught by teachers that hold negative perceptions about them (McKenzie, 2001; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Weissglass, 2001). The public schools still has numerous educational gaps to close if it is to be equitable to all students and give all students an equitable educational opportunity.

Equitable educational opportunity refers to a concept of equality and fairness with respect to educational opportunities, access, and academic outcomes for all students, regardless of race or socio-economic status. In addition, all students must be challenged and encouraged to achieve academically at high levels. If giving all students, regardless of race, an equitable educational opportunity and closing the persistent educational gaps is to be attained, then educators, especially White principals and teachers, will need to take a deep and sometimes uncomfortable look inside their own beliefs and perceptions of all students, including students of color. Although, there is limited research regarding the beliefs and perceptions White principals hold of students about race (see Ryan, 2003;

Young & Laible, 2000), there is much research on the influence teacher's attitudes, beliefs and perceptions have on student achievement.

*Teacher's Perceptions, Beliefs and Expectations*

In the classic, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) state that the beliefs and expectations a teacher holds about a student affect that student's academic achievement level. Likewise, Brophy and Good (1970), Ferguson (1998), Nash (1976), and Tompkins and Boor (1980) found that teacher's perceptions and expectations had a significant effect on the achievement levels of their students. Powell-Hobson and Hobson (1992) in their research of teacher's beliefs of student performance found teacher's perception of a student leads directly to an expectation of that student, and the student's academic performance tends to mirror the expectation of his or her teachers. Moreover, race is an important factor that shapes teacher's expectations (Braun, 1976). In their work with teachers and Black high school seniors, Pringle, Lyons and Booker (2010) found that teacher expectations did affect their student's achievement and the student's themselves had an understanding of the teacher's perceptions. Thus, when teachers perceive students to be capable of success and have high expectations of their performance, students tend to perform better. However, there is evidence to suggest White teachers tend to hold negative perceptions and low expectations of students of color (Carr, 1997; Cross, 2003; Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Weissglass, 2001) and struggle to understand the role race plays in their interactions (Cross, 2003; Pennington, 2007), thus reinforcing the racial achievement test gap. Garza & Garza (2010), McKenzie (2001)

and Sleeter (1993) found that not only did White teachers hold negative perceptions but they also tended to blame the students and their communities for the academic deficiencies. These White teachers believed the student's of color came from bad neighborhoods, had less competent and effective parents and were not as capable of doing well in school for a variety of personal and environmental factors (Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; Sleeter, 1993). Similarly, Kallin (1994) found teachers are not neutral and their actions can and do reinforce inequalities within the school.

If teachers' perceptions and attitudes have an affect on the students' achievement and the perceptions White teachers hold of students of color tend to be negative, then these perceptions negatively affect the achievement of students of color. Further, in the public school system today, the vast majority of principals rise from the ranks of teachers and currently over 81% of the teachers and administrators are White (NCES, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). Do White principals hold the same or similarly negative perceptions about students of color? If so, does this affect the students of color and, if so, is this a form of subtle racism?

### *Subtle Racism?*

Several researchers have documented the pervasive nature of racism within schools (Aleman, 2006; Gay, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1997; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Milner 2012a; Milner, 2012c; Troyna, 1993; Valenzuela, 1999). However, research indicates that school administrators tend not to recognize and address the issues of race and racism and do not understand the way it works (Young & Laible, 2000). Ryan

(2003) found that "...principals were reluctant to acknowledge that racism occurred in their schools. Moreover, those who did acknowledge it tended to emphasize its insignificant nature" (p. 149). Ryan continues that the administrators that did acknowledge racism in the schools saw racism primarily in terms of individual actions or isolated events. Thus, relegating racism to blatant and unmistakable acts of hatred, as opposed to the ways in which our beliefs, practices, knowledge and apparatuses reproduce a system of racial hierarchy (Lopez, 2003). This lack of understanding and action is unfortunate because administrators play a key role in lessening and limiting the effects of racism in schools (Gillborn, 1995; Henze, Katz & Norte, 2000; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992) and increasing student achievement (Marzano, 2005).

#### *Principals Make a Difference*

Principals are leaders of the schoolhouse and their perceptions and beliefs affect the culture of the school and thus, affect student achievement (Scott & Teddlie, 1987). Hickman (2004) states that a principal's individual experiences, beliefs, and knowledge are highly influential in their development of school policies and practices that meet the needs of all students. Principals set policies and procedures yearly. They evaluate, hire and dismiss teachers, oversee teacher assignments and the master schedule, oversee school discipline, administer special education services and attend ARD meetings, and set expectations for behavior and performance of both the students and the staff. Each of these actions has impact on the individual student, the student body, and the school staff. Providing remedial services for a student prior to the induction of special education services can have a lasting effect. Assigning the best, math teacher to instruct the

second-year Algebra one repeaters has an impact on the students. Just as assigning a first year, emergency certified, out of field math teacher to teach the same course would have an **affect on** the overall achievement of the students. These decisions then affect school climate, teachers' attitudes, and student achievement.

In the seminal study, "How leadership affects student learning," Leithwood et al, (2004), found that principals and administrative leadership were paramount to student learning, student achievement and the success of all students. Following six additional years of research, and a further review of the literature, Louis et al. (2010) reconfirmed the power of leadership and the principal position on student achievement, stating its affect and influence on student achievement is second only to classroom instruction. So, although a principal does not impact student achievement directly, their actions and decisions do have a strong affect.

A principal's perceptions inform his/her decisions. However, because Whites tend to not recognize race or racism or understand the ways it works institutionally and systematically (Anderson, 1990; Lopez, 2003; Rasmussen, 2001; Ryan, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000), these constructs are rarely considered sufficiently or effectively. Thus, the plight of the students of color is more difficult to recognize and understand.

White principals must become aware of their race and their perceptions of racism to advance to a position where systematic inequities in the school system can be addressed. White principals must begin to understand how institutions and schools reproduce inequitable outcomes for students of color. White principals need to recognize and attack the status quo beliefs and thinking commonly employed to justify institutional

inequities in the public school system. Delgado (1997) suggested that the role Whites should take to lift the “yokes of oppression that burden” is working with other Whites. An examination of White principal’s perceptions of race and racism will provide insight into our fight to dismantle the systematic inequities and persistent achievement test gap within the public school system. Therefore, an examination of the perceptions White principals hold of race and racism is warranted.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions selected White principals hold about race and racism. The perceptions and beliefs a principal holds affect their behavior and decisions. Since principals are leaders in their schools, these behaviors and decisions have consequences within the school. There is a positive relationship between administrative leadership and students’ achievement (Leitwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Riehl, 2000; Scheurich, 2002b) and “the kind of quality leadership we have will help determine, for better or worse, the kinds of schools we have” (Sergiovanni, 1991). This study will illuminate the perceptions selected White principals hold about race and racism in order to provide new knowledge and insight in the struggle to find solutions to the systematic inequities of the public school system and the persistent educational gaps, including the ever-present achievement test gap.

### **Research Questions**

This study will utilize three questions to guide the research.

- 1.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race?

- 2.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about racism?
- 3.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race and the principalship?

## **Methodology**

Qualitative case study methodology was used to conduct an in-depth examination of selected White principals' perceptions of race and racism. Merriam (1998, p. 27) defines qualitative case study as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit." Case study method is appropriate when one seeks to understand how and why a phenomenon occurs within its context (Yin, 1994, 1993). However, due to the nature of this study a critical case methodology was utilized. A critical case study "assume[s] theoretically that oppression and domination characterize the setting and seek[s] to uncover how patterns of action perpetuate the status quo" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 106). Further, a critical White studies framework was used to critically examine Whiteness as it applies to notions of privilege (McIntosh, 1989, 1997; Rains, 1998), dysconscious racism (King, 1997) and institutional racism (Feagin, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 2002). This approach is congruent with this research study as the epistemological rationale underlying this study stems from a critical view that racism is unintentionally perpetuated in public schools. By utilizing naturalistic inquiry and empathic neutrality this study attempts to unveil the racist attitudes and beliefs held by well-intentioned White educators.

For this study, 5 White principals were chosen by purposive method of sampling (Patton, 1990). All 5 principals worked in a large racially diverse school district in the

southern United States. For this study, a racially diverse school district was one with a White student population of less than 40% and large shall equate to a school district with at least 25,000 students.

Individual interviews are a traditional source of data collection in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 1998) and were utilized in this study. The initial individual interviews will be utilized to build rapport and baseline data. Two subsequent interviews were held with each participant to further explore their perceptions on race, racism and the principalship. The final interview was also be used to help clarify the data recorded and collected for summation and to accommodate any reciprocal questioning.

### **Definitions**

Achievement test gap – scores differences on achievement and standardized tests between racial groups

Bigot/bigotry - a person who is obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his or her own opinions and prejudices; especially one who regards or treats the members of a racial or ethnic group with hatred and intolerance

Discourse - concept describing all forms of communication that contribute to a particular, an institutionalized way of thinking; a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic; affect our views on all things; it is not possible to escape discourse

Educational gap – a collective term used to denote racial differences on educational indicators, including but not limited to: graduation rates, college-going and completion rates, teacher quality, course selection trends, facility quality, special education



placement rates, gifted and talented placement rates, school involvement level, and expenditures

Hegemonic – dominance or leadership over others

Perceptions – impression received by the mind; beliefs, attitudes, awareness, insight, intuition; the understanding and knowledge of a specific idea, concept and/or construct

Race – a dynamic social construct utilized to describe a group of people related by common descent or heredity or people united by common history, language, and cultural traits

Student of color (SOC) – Black, Hispanic/Latino, or “non-White” student

### **Significance**

This study examined White principal’s perceptions of race and racism. Research has shown that teacher perceptions of race and students of color can effect students’ achievement (Brophy & Good, 1970; Pringle, Lyons & Booker, 2010; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tompkins & Boor, 1980; Rist, 1970) and these perceptions tend to be negative in nature (Carr, 1997; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; Oates, 2003; Sleeter, 1994). This study expanded the research on educator perceptions of race and racism by examining the principal perceptions. School leaders in the United States need to be prepared for a more diverse student population and be prepared to offer every child an equitable educational opportunity. A better understanding of the perceptions White principals hold about race and racism will inform principal preparation programs and provide valuable insights for practitioners in the field.

## **Limitations**

This study adhered to the tenets of qualitative research. Thus, it is subjective and contextual and, therefore, is not generalizable to all area of the principalship (Stake, 1995). It is through the examination of this subjectivity that we come to know attitudes, beliefs and individual assumptions of our participants. Through this examination, we begin to develop new questions and start to make sense of our world.

Consistent with the tenets of qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 1998). The researcher did not attempt to control for bias and subjectivity, but rather expressed it openly. Peshkin (1988) states that one's subjectivities can be seen as virtuous as they are the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique combination of the researcher's own qualities and the data they have collected. As the researcher, I am a product of my worldview; my constructs and I see the world through my lens. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that I am a White male with over 10 years of experience as a public school administrator at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. I was also mathematics, health and physical education teacher for 6 years. I am currently a White school principal and doctoral student in Texas. I have lived in Texas, Massachusetts, Alabama, North and South Carolina and Arkansas and my experiences color my lens. In addition, the principals interviewed for the study brought their worldviews and perspectives (Stake, 1995).

## **Delimitations**

The scope of this study is the identification of selected White principals' perceptions of race and racism. The researcher will not express judgment or examine the principals overall effectiveness or their leadership qualities. The academic performance of the students of color and the achievement gap between those students and their White counterparts were discussed but the relationship between the student's achievement and the principals' perceptions were not the focus. This study focused solely on selected principals' perceptions of race and racism.

## **Assumptions**

Understanding race, racism and Whiteness can be challenging topics for White people to discuss (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Lopez, 2003; Nichols, 2010; Ogbu, 1978; Rasmussen, 2001; Ryan, 2003; Sleeter, 1995; Young & Laible, 2000). Although, "talking about race in America is a highly emotional matter" (Milner, 2012a, p. 868) and sometimes difficult for Whites (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 1992, 1997), the researcher will make the assumption that professional White principals will speak candidly and openly about the topic of race and racism. The researcher assumes that since they are **professionals**, and the topic is relevant and important, that they will conduct themselves in a professional manner and participate fully. The researcher also assumes the need to insure the accuracy of the data and to richly describe the phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

Students of color are struggling in today's public school institutions. As a result, No Child Left Behind (2001) was passed, in part, to address the persistent achievement gap. Despite the efforts of NCLB, the achievement test gap between White students and their students of color counterparts still exists today (Kobrin, Sathy, & Shaw, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg & Dion, 2005a, 2005b; Walker, & Bridgeman, 2008). Educators, especially White educators, are slow to discuss the hegemonic White discourse in public schools, even though previous research shows that students of color continue to struggle on a variety of educational outcomes (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Lopez, 2003; Nichols, 2010; Ogbu, 1978; Rasmussen, 2001; Ryan, 2003; Sleeter, 1995; Young & Laible, 2000). We have yet to fully consider that the public schools are institutions that advantage one group over another and reproduce inequities.

Research suggests that the perceptions educators hold about students of color do play an important role in today's schools. A teacher's perceptions of students of color have a relationship on the academic achievement of those students (Brophy & Good, 1970; Ferguson, 1998; Gay, 1997; Lumsden, 2000; Nash, 1976; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Tompkins & Boor, 1980). However, some research shows that White teachers hold negative perceptions of students of color (Carr, 1997; Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Weissglass, 2001). These negative perceptions can have adverse effects on student achievement and assist in fostering the hegemonic White discourse and the status quo of the public education system.

Principals are leaders of the school. Therefore, they play an important role in recognizing the hegemonic White discourse within the schools. The perceptions of race and racism that principals hold will affect their behaviors and help to determine if they are going to enable or interrupt the discourse. However, there is limited research on the perceptions White principals hold of race or racism (see Ryan, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000). Young and Liabile (2000) found that school administrators tend not to recognize, nor address the issues of race and Ryan (2003) found principals were reluctant to acknowledge racism in their schools. Thus, a deeper examination of the perceptions principals hold about race and racism is warranted. Since over 80% of the current public school principals are White (NCES, 2013), this was primarily an examination of White principals' perceptions of race and racism. McKenzie (2001, p. 325) concurs, "Principals play an important role in determining whether the current discourse will be perpetuated or disrupted". Therefore, it is important to unearth the perceptions and sub-conscious beliefs systems White principals have about race and racism.

### **Organization of Study**

Chapter one discussed the justification for the proposed study by stating the problem, its significance and its purpose. In addition, this chapter presented the methodologies the researcher will employ, the assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the proposed study.

In chapter two, a review of the literature is presented. The literature review includes: students of color in an educational setting, prejudice, race, racism, Whiteness, White racism (Allport, 1954; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner,

2010; 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Tatum, 1997; Wellman 1977, 1992), White racial identity development (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1993; Helms & Carter, 1990; Tatum, 1992), White identity orientation (Howard, 1999), “equity traps” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Milner, 2012b), social justice (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Gerwitz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Theoharis, 2007; West, 1999) and the role of the principal (Sergiovanni, 2001; Leithwood, et al., 2004).

In chapter three, the methods of inquiry and protocols used to conduct the study are described. The selection of participants, the research methodology, research design, sources of data collection, data analysis are presented and the limitations of the study are also revisited.

In chapter four, the results and findings from the research study are presented. The participants are introduced and a brief description of each is included. Data retrieved from the interviews are imparted.

Chapter five discusses and analyzes the findings of the research study. In addition, the implications of these findings for the public educational system and suggestions for the future are conveyed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Literature Review**

#### *Introduction*

Chapter two examines the literature on the most pertinent aspects of this study. Students of color still struggle and lag behind their White counterparts on a wide variety of educational indicators. This study will begin by first reviewing the literature examining how students of color are performing in an educational setting. Next, a review of the literature will be presented on the following topics: critical race theory (Bell, 1987, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), race, prejudice, racism, Whiteness and White racism (Allport, 1954; Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Milner, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Schuerich, 2002b; Scheurich & Young, 1992; Tatum, 1997; Wellman 1977, 1992), White racial identity development (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1993; Helms & Carter, 1990; Tatum, 1992); White identity orientations (Howard, 1999); “equity traps” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; McKenzie & Schuerich, 2004; Milner, 2012b) and the principal position (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Marzano, 2005; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Finally, a summary and conclusion of the chapter will follow the literature review.

#### *How are Students of Color Performing in Today’s Public Education System?*

With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), states are mandated to develop accountability systems that drive towards closing the achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts. NCLB (2001) mandates schools to equitably educate all children. Despite this policy and the increased focus on the

achievement test gap, students of color still struggle to maintain pace with their White peers on a variety of educational indicators.

An abundance of research shows that students of color continue to lag significantly behind their White counterparts on achievement tests throughout the United States (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; College Board, 1999, 2009; Ferguson, 2002; Kobrin, Sathy, & Shaw, 2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003, 2010; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg, & Dion, 2005a, 2005b; Walker & Bridgeman, 2008).

Although some states are relatively new to the strong accountability aspects of NCLB, Texas has been using high stakes tests for over 19 years. In Texas, each spring every student in grades 3<sup>rd</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> must take a variety of standardized high stakes tests. In 1994, on the then titled Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the achievement test gap between White students and students of color, using the aggregated 3<sup>rd</sup> –10<sup>th</sup> grade scores, ranged from a low of 18% in reading between Hispanics and White students to a high of over 35% in mathematics between Black and White students (Texas Education Agency, 1994).



TAKS Spring 2011	Percentage Passing 3 <sup>rd</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Percentage Passing with Achievement Gap percentage in ( ) 3 <sup>rd</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Percentage Passing with Achievement Gap percentage in ( ) 3 <sup>rd</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> grade
	White	Hispanic	Black
Reading Eng/Language Arts	95%	87% (-8%)	86% (-9%)
Mathematics	91%	81% (-10%)	75% (-16%)
Science	92%	78% (-12%)	74% (-18%)
Social Studies	98%	94% (-4%)	92% (-6%)
Writing	94%	91% (-3%)	89% (-5%)

**Fig. 1** – Passing rates from the spring 2011 administration of the TAKS tests, aggregate of 3<sup>rd</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> grades, sub-groups are disaggregated with the achievement gap between students of color and White students in parenthesis (Texas Education Agency, 2012)

Results from the 2010-2011 school year (see Fig. 1) indicate that the achievement test gap continues to persist in Texas with gaps ranging from a low of 3% between Hispanics and Whites on the writing test to a high of 18% between Blacks and Whites on the science test (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

In 2012, Texas introduced a new assessment test, STAAR, and the gaps between Whites and students of color were again evident. Results on the recommended standard of the 2012 STAAR End-of-Course tests showed achievement test gaps between Black and White students ranging from a low of 26% on the algebra 1, English reading tests and the English writing tests to a high of 33% on the world geography test (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Additionally, the gaps between Whites and Hispanic showed similar results. Test results show achievement test gaps between Hispanics and White students ranging from a high of 27% on the biology and world geography tests to a low of 20% on the algebra 1 test (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Although the achievement test gaps have narrowed slightly, they still remain strong, prominent and elusive. However, the

achievement test gap “is only one dimension of a much more complex and nuanced reality” for students of color and the public school institution (Milner, 2012a, p.694).

Although the achievement test gap is a glaring disparity between students of color and White students, there are several other educational indicators that raise concern about an equitable education for all students. A closer examination of the public education system shows students of color are more often educated by less experienced teachers (Barton, 2003; Condren & Roscigno, 2003; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thorenson, 2001; Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000), attend schools with a higher rate of teacher turnover (Barton, 2003; Cortese, 2007, Hanshuk, Kain, & Rivkin, 2002) and are taught by more uncertified and “out of field” teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007, Shields et al., 2001). Inexperienced, uncertified and out of field teachers often require extra support to be most successful and are rarely the instructional leaders of a campus. Although these teachers required more support and more resources to be at their optimal best, students of color more frequently attend schools with fewer resources (Barton, 2003; Kozol, 1991; Lee, 2004). This limits the ability of the schools to adequately support the school and the teachers. Schools with fewer resources, less experienced teachers and more courses led by out-of-field teachers are far from ideal and many times problematic for students of color (Barton, 2003; Kozol, 1991). This situation combined with a higher than normal teacher turnover rate and fewer resources creates an instructional setting for students of color that is far from optimal.

Further, students of color are overrepresented in special education and lower level classes (Blanchett, 2006; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen &

Oldfield, 2002; Oakes, 2010; Reglins, 1992; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994), and under-represented in gifted and talented and college track courses (Ford, 2006, 2010; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 1994; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994). This over-representation of students of color in lower level and the disproportionate representation in college-track courses not only affects the achievement test gap, but also adversely affects post-secondary success, future earning potential and job status. College track and higher-level courses are more rigorous and are better designed to help prepare high school students for the academic achievement tests and the college entrance exams that higher education requires. Thus, if students of color are underrepresented in these classes then they are less prepared than their White counterparts for the academic achievement tests, college entrance exams and higher education. The lack of preparation is evident as research also shows students of color score considerably lower than their White counterparts on college entrance exams (College Board, 1999, 2009; Ferguson, 2002; Kobrin, Sathy, & Shaw, 2007; Marayuma, 2003; Noguera, 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Walker & Bridgeman, 2008). In 2009, White college bound students outscored Black college bound students by 100 points on the SAT critical reading section and 110 points higher on the SAT math section (College Board, 2009). Consequently, Marayuma (2001, 2003) found that students of color are less likely to both seek and gain admission to a college or university and there are substantial differences in college enrollment and completion rates between White students and students of color (NCES, 2008; Ellwood & Kane, 2000).

If students of color are over-represented in lower level and special education classes and under-represented in higher-level courses and college track classes, then they are not receiving the most appropriate education possible and are not receiving an education equal to their White counterparts. All of these factors limit post-secondary opportunities and success. This lack of opportunity combined with less experienced teachers and schools with fewer resources helps to create a public school system with many challenges for students of color.

In light of all the challenges in the public school system, it is not surprising to find students of color are more likely to be expelled or suspended (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Gordon, Paina & Kelcher, 2000) and are dropping out of school more often (Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992; Deviney & Cavazos, 2006; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009; Lee, 2002; Schott, 2010). Deviney and Cavazos (2006) conducted a study of Texas students and found that the freshman class of 2000 had 3.7% of its Black students and 6.3% of its Hispanic class dropout before graduation in 2004 as compared to only 1.9% of White students in the same time period. Similarly, in 2011, in Texas, Black students were dropping out of school at a rate three times and Hispanic students two and half times higher than the rate of their White counterparts (TEA, 2012). Finally, a national report from United States Department of Education (NCES, 2012) found students of color were dropping out of high school at a rate that was more than 50% higher than White students. Consequently, students of color graduate high school at considerably lower rates than do their White counterparts (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Noguera, 2012; Swanson, 2004) and are still finding it very difficult to

successfully navigate the public education system in the United States. In an educational era of high-stakes testing and accountability, the United States public education system is grossly underperforming for its student of color on a variety of educational indicators.

In today's public school system, students of color must attempt to excel under many adverse conditions. With educational indicators showing students of color enrolled in fewer college-track courses and more remedial or lower-level courses, increased rates of at-risk and special education placements, more frequent suspensions and expulsions, and increased percentage of drop-outs present, it is no wonder the public school system persistently maintains and consistently discusses the achievement test gap between White students and students of color. However, the disparities and failures are not exclusive to the achievement test gap.

Unfortunately, for educators and lay people alike, the achievement test gap is often used as a "catch-all" for the copious number of disproportionate racial outcomes and discrepancies within the public school system. More accurately, the achievement test gap is only one indicator of a more profound problem that encompasses much more than just test scores (Milner, 2012a). In the public school system today there is not as much of an achievement test gap as there is an "educational debt" that the public school system owes to the many students it so inadequately serves (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Irvine (2010) goes even further to say the achievement test gap is the result of all the other educational discrepancies, "the teacher quality gap, the teacher training gap, the challenging curriculum gap, the school funding gap, the digital divide gap... the nutrition gap, the school integration gap and the quality childcare gap" (p. xii). Irvine (2010)

posits the achievement test gap actually seductively coerces educators into believing it is the actual problem when it is only a collective indicator for all the other educational and social gaps. That is, all the other racial inequities in the public school system and the differences in learning opportunities, all lead to and exacerbate the more popular achievement test gap. Collaboratively, these inequities interact to produce a multitude of racially disproportionate outcomes for students of color.

With the abundance of disproportionate racial outcomes and educational gaps, including the achievement test gap, within the public education system, the questions become not whether the public school system is failing students of color, or how the public school system is failing its students of color, but rather, why is the public school system continuing to fail its students of color?

### *Are Students of Color are Still Struggling?*

The public school system continues to benefit White students while consistently and persistently failing students of color. The racial disparities in our public school systems are profound and cannot be ignored. Yet, educators and educational scholars rarely turn the critical lens back towards the school system itself for answers. However, critical scholars and theorists suggest ways to address the public school system's failings. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) theorists believe "the current way society is organized is unjust" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21) and seeks to examine the ways the constructs of White society ensure educational, social, political and economic benefits and advantages for Whites. Critical Whiteness studies researchers analyze, challenge and critique the systemic structures of White privilege and Whiteness. In education this

means examining and critiquing the relationship of race and racism within the schoolhouse with school leaders, teachers, staff, parents and students.

However, research has shown that the public school system is failing students of color on a variety of educational indicators while concurrently benefitting White students. The institution of public schools in the United States produces systematic, consistent, racially biased outcomes that benefit Whites students at the expense and continued struggle of students of color. Thus, sadly, the United States public school system remains a profound example of systematic and institutional racism in America. A discussion of institutional and systematic racism follows.

### *Institutional and Systematic Racism*

“To be certain, racism has never waned in society; it has merely been manifested in different forms.” Gerardo Lopez (2003, p. 68)

Institutional racism exists when organizations and institutions, including the public school system, operate with procedures and processes that damage one or more races of people in relation to the dominant race, intentionally or not and in America can be traced as far back as the slave trade of colonial times and beyond (Thomas 1999). Grant & Ladson-Billings (1997) defined institutional racism as, “the systematic practices which deny and exclude people of color from access to social resources and that perpetuate their subordination in political, economic, and social life” (p. 231). The grand scale of systematic and institutional racism helps to camouflage its affects from many and unlike the more easily recognized overt individual racially prejudice acts, institutional racism is subtle (Keleher & Johnson, 2001), quietly omnipresent (Lawrence, 1993),

operates unquestioned through normative procedures (Lucal, 1996). It is even described by some as invisible (Pence & Fields, 1999). It is the systemic nature of racism within the social fabric of the United States and within educational institutions and organizations that makes it elusive to the majority (Lund, 2010). Instances of institutional racism conferring racially biased outcomes can be seen today in many areas including: education, criminal justice, economics and political participation (see Campbell, 2003; Christle, Jovilette & Nelson, 2007; Stanard, 2003).

However, for many educators, and most White folks, the concept of institutional racism is oblivious. Before educators and White folks can begin to recognize institutional and systematic racism we will have to first understand and recognize our race, racial prejudice and racism. Not racism as an individual atrocity or overt act but rather as a culturally sanctioned, system of advantages based on race (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson –Billings & Tate, 1995).

To provide a better understanding, a more in depth discussion of race, prejudice and racism follows.

### *Race, Prejudice and Racism*

“The differences between Black folks and White folks are not blood or color, and the ties that bind us are deeper than those that separate us.” Richard Wright (1941)

Race, prejudice, and racism are forever intertwined. In today’s society, racial categories are used to differentiate people and groups. Prejudice, a preconceived judgment or opinion, is both natural and common in human beings (Allport, 1954; Augoustionos & Reynolds, 2001) and the nature of prejudice makes it highly pervasive,



often falling along categories and divisions of race (Allport, 1954; Appiah, 1990; D'Souza, 1996; Samelson, 1978; Tatum, 1993). So, if racial prejudice is common and pervasive among human beings, then is racism wide-ranging as well? Considering the current state of the public school system, race, prejudice and racism are all important factors in the discussion of equitable schools, equitable educational outcomes, the educational gaps, the achievement test gap and the overall success of students of color. Thus, for the purposes of this study, a deeper discussion and understanding of race, prejudice and racism is pertinent.

### *Let's Start with Race*

“At some future period, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world. “ Charles Darwin (1884)

The precise origin of the word “race” originates in the Latin root, *ratio*, with a meaning similar to “species” or “kind” (Smedley, 1999). However, the term race has more recently been used to designate groups of humans marked by their common origins and shared characteristics as a family, tribe, people, or nation of the same-stock (MacEachern, 2011) or as Lopez (1994) describes, a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry. As the constructs of race emerged in the early 1800s, as part of what is largely known as the European Enlightenment, scientists of the day were intent on classifying the diversity of life on earth, plants, animals and humans included (Painter, 2003, 2010; Todorov, 1993), and initially humans were commonly classified by race. These race classifications included a ranking system with Europeans of Caucasian

descendant at the top and Africans at the bottom of the scale, creating a system that sanctioned racial divisions and racial hierarchy. These racial classifications and hierarchies helped to form a social structure that awarded Europeans over non-Europeans, or those who are White over those who would become “non-White” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). However, in today’s global world, with the increases in mobility and diversity, race has become less informative and a less valid descriptor of people (Allport, 1954; Gates, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and as a result the world of science and biology has found the concept of race virtually useless (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Williamson, 1980; Zack, 1994).

Despite these limitations, race and racial categories still maintain a strong foothold in the psyches of Americans and educators alike. Local, state, federal governments, educational institutions and educational reforms all delineate people by race. Schools across the United States are graded and ranked according to how each of the differentiated racial groups performs on standardized tests (NCLB, 2001). Many colleges and universities in the United States subscribe to race-based admission policies (Card & Krueger, 2004; Hicklin, 2007; Long, 2004; Long & Tienda, 2008). The state driver’s license application asks applicants for their race: White, Black, Hispanic non-White, Asian, or other (see [www.txdps.state.tx.us/DriverLicense](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/DriverLicense)). If you want to know how many Black, Native American and Pacific Islanders people live in any given state or county or town, investigate the federal census (see [www.census.gov/population/race](http://www.census.gov/population/race)). If you would like to know how many Hispanic students graduated from Texas public schools in 2011 or how many Black teachers worked across the Texas that year, one need only to

check the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website to see racially delineated statistics (see <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/reports>). National statistics of the like can be found at National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) as well (see <http://nces.ed.gov/annuals>). Racial division are prominent in our society today, so much so that children by the age of three and four can already begin to recognize racial categories and divisions (Tatum, 1993). In short, in America, “race matters” (West, 1994) in ways that exceed simple differences in skin color.

However, in today’s society, race no longer functions as an essential descriptor of people but rather as dynamic “social construct” with both a history and a social meaning (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). The history of race acts as a powerful lens, controlling what is known and serving as a guide to the present understanding of the construct (Thompson, 2008). The constructs of race and racial differences exist with their history attached and they carry a social reality for each and all. In America today, to be Black or White or Hispanic carries real meaning, or a social reality, and that reality has real social implications on people’s lives. As Wellman (1993, p. 4) says, “Race is still a deadly serious category in America; how one is designated racially profoundly affects the experience of being an American” and “continues to be a significant factor in determining inequities in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48).

Thus, the delineation of races is highly familiar to Americans and educators alike and the history and social meaning these constructs carry continually affect us all. Additionally, the high level of utilization and heavy reliance on racial divisions in the

United States has helped to create easy avenues for both racial prejudice and bigotry to flourish. A further discussion of prejudice and race-based discrimination follows.

*Prejudice? Not a prejudiced bone in me!*

“It is utterly exhausting being Black in America physically, mentally, and emotionally. There is no respite or escape from your badge of color” Marian Wright Edelman (1992)

Derived from the Latin noun *praejudicium*, which meant precedent or a judgment based on previous decision or experiences, prejudice is formally defined as an opinion made without adequate basis, or a bias (Merriam-Webster, 1998). Since humans have a natural tendency to form categories, concepts and generalizations to simplify their world experiences (Allport, 1954), opinions, beliefs and perceptions about individuals and groups, including racial groups, are seen as quite natural and common (Allport, 1954; Appiah, 1990; Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; D’Souza, 1996; Samelson, 1978). Thus, racial prejudice is quite normal and common (Hoyt, 2012) and some would say “inescapable” (Tatum, 1997).

However, Wellman (1977, 1993) reminds us, racially prejudice attitudes and beliefs are often misinterpretations of the social world in which they reside. Likewise, Tatum (1997) posits, racially prejudice misconceptions and misjudgments are commonly based on faulty information received through everyday life. Since racial prejudice and racial perceptions are shaped by one’s experiences no one can live in the United States today and be free of racial stereotypes, misinformation and factual omissions based on race (Tatum, 1997). We are all affected by the cultural information we receive from birth and the frequent media distortions and stereotypes, the ethnic and racial jokes, the limited

interaction between racial groups and the misinformation we receive about the racial “others” all help to feed racial prejudice in America (Tatum, 1997). Milner (2012c, p. 4) concurs, “people’s misperceptions, assertions, and stereotypes about Black students come from a variety of sources, including their parents, the media, or even isolated negative experiences that they have had with Black people both inside and outside of the classroom”.

Racially prejudiced attitudes and beliefs also prevail due to the consistent omission of the histories of people of color in schooling by the dominant culture. In schools today, “traditional teaching and learning in humanities classrooms focus on textbooks as the primary materials of instruction and teachers as didactic instructors who disseminate mainstream versions of historical and literary knowledge” (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, p. 3). However, researchers have shown that social studies standards, textbooks and classrooms in the United States consistently omit or inadequately address race and racism (Brown & Brown, 2010a, 2010b; Loewen, 2007, Helig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Howard, 2004, Gay, 2003). The deficient textbooks combined with the mainstream, hegemonic presentation of race and racism within our schools helps to maintain racial stereotypes and misperceptions. How many American children, and how many White American children know Cleopatra was a Black, African women? Has White imperialism, led by the White Europeans, been adequately, or truthfully presented? How many Native Americans were lied to, tricked, tortured and killed during the formation of the United States? Many students in American public schools today simply do not have adequate answers to these questions because these

racially sensitive topics are discussed with a preferred lens or omitted completely (Kurtis, Adams, & Yellowbird, 2010; Helig, Brown & Brown, 2012; Howard, 2004; Loewen, 1995, 1999, 2007; Pitre & Ray, 2002). Feagin (2010, p. xi) concurs, “few mainstream media presentations or school textbooks provide full and accurate accounts of the history or current status of racial oppression in the United States”. Thus, information and knowledge about races is tainted and it affects racial perceptions.

Further, books, television, movies, newspapers and the media in general are full of stereotypical racial archetypes (Ross, 1990; Tatum, 1997). In what Tatum (1997) calls, “cultural racism”, cultural images, radio and television shows with characters like Archie Bunker on *All in the Family*, Fred Sanford on *Sanford and Son*, and Rush Limbaugh of the *Rush Limbaugh Show*, and films like *Soul Man*, *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Lion King*, all affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color (Giroux, 1997; Russell, 1991; Tatum, 1997). These images all affect racial perceptions just as the consistent images of all-White newscaster teams do, the disproportionate newsroom coverage of crime involving people of color do and the fact that all 47 Vice-Presidents and 43 out of the 44 Presidents of the United States have all been Whites does. So as Americans, we are all contaminated, we are all fed misinformation and stereotypical information that helps to feed racial prejudice. Tatum (1997) says, “we all have prejudices, not because we want them, but simply because we are so continually exposed to misinformation about others” (Tatum, 1997, p. 6). Hoyt Jr. (2012, p. 226) agrees, “we all have our prejudices, and we can be prejudiced about things, ideas, or people. Hence anyone, regardless of color, can harbor prejudicial, even hatefully

prejudicial feelings about any race”. So, just as racial prejudice has existed throughout history, it exists today and is an “integral part of our socialization” (Tatum, 1997, p. 6) in America. In the United States, the consistent exposure to misinformation and the lack of education around race help to cultivate racially prejudice stereotypes and attitudes.

Racial prejudice is natural, common and “inescapable” (Tatum, 1997) and, in America, is commonly fed by misinformation and misconceptions between races. These racially prejudiced perceptions and misconceptions can lead to acts of overt racial prejudice and bigotry and these racially prejudice acts are what most people, especially Whites, think of when they conceptualize racism (Ikuenobe, 2011; Lopez, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Schuerich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Liable, 2000). “Rarely is a book written about racism that does not explain America’s racial problems in terms of one sort of prejudices or another. Racism and prejudice usually mean the same thing” (Wellman, 1977, p.4). Although, inevitably linked together, racially prejudice acts committed by individual and groups do not and cannot encompass the enormity, pervasiveness and systematic nature of racism in the United States and our public institutions. While many people in America, and most Whites, equate racially prejudice acts to racism (Hoyt, 2012; Ryan, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Wellman, 1977, 1993), many people and many scholars would disagree (Lopez, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Wellman, 1977, 1993). Thus, a more extensive discussion of racially prejudice acts, bigotry and racism follows to help clarify this discussion.

### *Racial Prejudice and Racism, Same Thing?*

A clearer understanding of racially prejudice acts will help to better define and comprehend racism in America. Racially prejudice acts can be committed publicly in plain sight or quietly with little detection or notice. While all racially prejudice acts are regrettable, clarification is warranted.

#### *Covert acts.*

Covert acts of racial prejudice are committed clandestinely and out of the public eye (Coats, 2011; Schuerich & Young, 1997). Individuals and groups conducting themselves in covert ways do not publicly announce their racially prejudice actions or intentions but rather veil them and, if needed, provide palatable explanations for their actions. For example, a principal may promote a White teacher to the position of assistant principal instead of the more qualified Black teacher candidate. While the principal is stealthily operating in a racially prejudiced manner, publicly, the principal offers a socially acceptable basis for the promotion to hide the racial prejudice and to avoid any negative consequences. Similarly, a homeowner or real estate agent may secretly rent or sell a house to a White family while slyly passing up on a well-qualified family of color. Likewise, companies and employers can surreptitiously refuse to hire people of color and schools can quietly exclude students of color from rigorous college-track courses with scarce recognition and little recourse. These acts of racial prejudice are difficult to detect and if questioned, several socially suitable answers are available to the homeowner, the employers and the educators to avoid detection and any detrimental consequences. This



makes covert acts of racial prejudice hard to notice and difficult to identify but not undetectable.

Although covert acts of racial prejudice are **challenging** to recognize, there are rules and laws written to dissuade and prevent them, particularly in the arena of employment practices and housing (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Laws like the Equal Employment **Opportunities** Act of 1972, the Equal Opportunities Act of 1974, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, birthed from the Civil Rights Act of 1968, have all helped to dissuade covert racial prejudice in the employment and housing arena, respectively, but they have not exterminated them, as covert acts of racial prejudice and race-based discrimination still abound today (Aleo & Svirsky, 2008; Lipitz, 2006; Morning & Sabbagh, 2005; Oyama, 2009).

*Overt acts and bigotry.*

Unlike covert acts of racial prejudice, overt acts are public, outward acts perpetrated by individuals or groups of people from one race **intending to damage** individuals and groups of people from a different race (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Conscious, public acts directed at specific racial groups such as verbal slurs, beatings, lynchings and killings are obvious, overt signs of racial prejudice and although new “hate-law” legislation and current social mores have made this type of overt behavior less common and more likely to be prosecuted, these acts do still occur. The assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, the murder of Vincent Chin in Michigan in 1982, the brutal beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1992, the unwarranted attacks on people of Arab descent after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, the vile killing of James Byrd in

Texas in 1998, the shooting of Amadou Diallo by police in New York in 1999, the 2007 fraternity party at Tarleton State University in Texas mocking Martin Luther King Day, the arrest of Harvard professor Dr. Henry L Gates in his home in 2009, and the 2012 sorority party at Pennsylvania State University, complete with large signs spouting racial slurs and the mocking of Mexican culture, are some of the well publicized overt acts of racial prejudice in recent United States history. In addition to these more violent or obvious overt acts, the moving of a purse when a young Black male walks by, the comments and jokes about ethnic immigrants and people of color, and the blatant racial profiling by police departments (Antonovics & Knight, 2009; Harris, 1999; Russell, 1997) are all further examples of overt racial prejudice in America. So, even with greater social awareness, stronger laws and increased media attention, these overt racially based acts confirm that racial prejudice still abounds today.

Taken together, individual overt and covert acts of racial prejudice are plentiful today and in the United States these racially prejudiced acts are typically what are understood, especially by Whites, to be racism (Ikuenobe, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Schuerich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Liable, 2000). However, as stated earlier, the question of whether or not racism in the United States today is confined to just individual or group acts of overt and covert racial prejudice is contested. While racial prejudice may be “an inescapable consequences of living in a racist society” (Tatum, 1997, p. 6) and a vehicle to help perpetuate bigotry, the debate centers around the questions of whether or not these racially prejudiced acts, taken together, are sufficient enough to explain the permanence, persistence and breadth of racism in America. Thus, a more extensive

examination of racism, its actors and its consequences is presented to clarify racism in America.

### *Racism Lives*

“Why is it so difficult for many White folks to understand that racism is oppressive not because White folks have prejudicial feelings about Blacks (they could have such feelings and leave us alone) but because it is a system that promotes domination and subjugation?” b. hooks (1995)

Race is the social construct shaping many educational reforms today and still plays a prominent role in the United States and around the world. Through the construct and history of race and with the support of racial prejudice, racism survives and, some would say, flourishes today. “Racism is an integral, permanent and indestructible component of this society” (Bell, 1992, p. ix) and is so pervasive we take many of its manifestations for granted (Yamato, 1990). Unfortunately, racism is still prevalent and persistent but what is it and who is affected?

### *Racism seems simple, but what is it?*

Few terms provoke the confusion, consternation and debate that the term “racism” does. The term racism was originally crafted to frame a phenomenon that by the early part of the 20th century, after emerging in the 19th century from the enterprise of classifying humans according to a racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Fredrickson, 2002; Painter, 2003, 2010; Todorov, 1993), was powerful, distinct, and in need of nomenclature (Hoyt, 2012). Fredrickson (2002) notes, “[racism] came into common usage in the 1930s when a new word was required to describe the theories on which the

Nazis based their persecution of the Jews"(p. 5) and it was "based on the inferiority and superiority of races"(p. 5). Thus, the original definition of racism was based in racially prejudice actions committed by individuals and groups from one race against other racial people and groups. This initial definition of racism is a particular form of racial prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous perceptions and beliefs about race by members of one racial group and the belief in the superiority/inferiority of people based on this racial identity (Hoyt, 2012; Lopez, 2003; Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1993). For those who adhere to this definition of racism, racial prejudice and racism are commonly used as interchangeable terms (Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1977, 1993) and for them, overt and covert acts of racial prejudice vividly demonstrate and comprise racism in America. Thus, racism is restricted to erroneous racial perceptions and beliefs and racially "raw, overt bigotry" (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987, p.46) by one individual or one racial group against another racial group.

This limited definition of racism and the "focus on explicit acts has ignored the subtle, hidden and often insidious forms of racism that operate at a deeper, more systematic level" (Lopez, 2003, p. 70). However, it is in this camp that many Whites find themselves believing explicit, overt acts of racially prejudice and bigotry equate to racism (Ikuenobe, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Schuerich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Liable, 2000). This is a convenient definition and belief of racism for Whites because it relegates racism to individual acts of prejudice and allows Whites an easy escape to being non-racist. Whites see racism as an individual issue and if they are not committing racially prejudicial acts then they can't possibly be racist (Schuerich, 1993).

“Whites usually think of racism in terms of the overt behaviors of individuals that can readily be identified and labeled” and “a person who does not behave in these identified ways is not considered to be a racist” (Scheurich, 1993, p. 6).

However, a recent revision to the definition and understanding of racism relegates it to exclusively include systematic power and privileges conferred to specific racial groups at the expense of other racial groups (Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1977, 1993). Thus, the disagreement between the original definition and the revised definition of racism allow for much discussion.

If, as most Whites believe, racism equals the sum total of all racially prejudiced acts then if we just end racial prejudice and bigotry, racism would disappear as well. However, as Wellman (1977, 1993) successfully argues, racially prejudiced people expressing intolerant attitudes are not the only racist in America and racially prejudiced people and racially prejudiced acts, taken together, are not sufficient enough to account for and explain the pervasiveness of racism and its outcomes in America (Tatum, 1993). Individual racial prejudices and racial bigotry cannot account for all the educational gaps in the public schools, the racially disproportional rates in the criminal justice system (see Campbell, 2003; Christle, Jovilette, & Nelson, 2007; Harrison, 2005; Lusane, 2000; Stanard, 2003), or the racial discrepancies in housing and employment (see Aleo & Svirsky, 2008; Flagg, 1993, 1995; Mahoney, 1995; Morning & Sabbagh, 2005; Oyama, 2009).

Thus, a more comprehensive approach to defining racism, and one the “revisionists” believe to be more accurate, states racism is a culturally sanctioned, system

of advantages based on race (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003; Pinderhughes, 1989; Rains, 1997 Tatum, 1997; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003; Wellman, 1977, 1993). This definition allows racism to be seen not as individual ideologies and individual acts based on racial prejudice, but as “a system involving cultural messages, institutional policies and practices” (Tatum, 1993, p.7). From this perspective, in America, “racism is seen to systematically provide economic, political, psychological and social advantages for Whites at the expense of Blacks and others people of color (Wellman, 1977, p. 37). Tatum (1993) says, “I prefer Wellman’s (1977) definition because the idea of systematic advantage and disadvantage is critical to an understanding of how racism operates in American society”(p. 8).

The well-documented inferior conditions and outcomes of the public school system that are allowed to still exist and persist for students of color indicate that institutional racism is prevalent in school districts across the United States (Taylor & Clark, 2009). These educational indicators demonstrate that the public school system is bias against students of color and to the benefit of White students. Thus, the public school system remains a conspicuous example of large-scale systematic, institutional White racism in America today. A deeper discussion of White racism, Whiteness and White privileges follows.

#### *White Racism, White Privilege and Whiteness*

##### *White racism*

“White racism is what White people do to protect the special benefits they gain by virtue of their skin color” Wellman (1977, p. 236)

“White racism is one of the most difficult problems facing the United States today and is the most consequential for the nation’s future” Feagin & Vera (1995, p. 1)

White racism can be viewed as an “organized set of attitudes, ideas, and practices that deny African-Americans and other people of color the dignity, opportunities, freedoms and rewards that this nation offers White Americans” (Feagin & Vera, 1995, p.7). Although some scholars believe that people of color are making “real and solid progress” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997, p. 535) and “have become full members of what may be called the nation’s moral community and cultural life” (Patterson, 1997, p.17), many view White racism, and the privileges conferred to Whites at the expense of people of color, as a profound and pervasive problem in the United States (Feagin, 1997; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Rains, 2004). “White racism is a social disease that afflicts the minds, behaviors and institutions of Whites” and it “invades every nook and cranny of U.S. society” (Feagin, 1997, p. 27). The systemic practices and outcomes of White racism have not diminished and the racist ideologies and stereotypes continue today (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Johnson, Rush & Feagin, 2000).

In America, since people are born with bodies that are inscripted with social meaning (Leonardo, 2000), “...all Whites are socially positioned as Whites and receive social advantages because of this positionality...” (Scheurich, 1993, p. 9) and this positioning leads to a global advantage with many privileges conferred (Leonardo, 2002; DuBois, 1989). The systematic power of White racism in the United States continually bestows advantages and privileges on Whites at the expense of people of color and the

“benign acts of White privilege and the hidden benefits that accrue...sustain racial inequality” (Rains, 1997, p. 82).

However, the advantages and privileges of White racism are so deeply embedded in social institutions and the consciousness of individuals that it is often "rendered invisible" to Whites themselves (Feagin, Vera & Batur, 2001; Rains, 2004). Since, most Whites do “not even...notice they are White (Stanfield, 1985, p. 400), and tend to experience themselves as non-racialized and not defined by race (Dalton, 1995; Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Ogbu, 1978), recognizing White racism, its privileges and how it works can be quite difficult for Whites (Aveling, 2007; Heinze, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1989; Rains, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Weiler, 1988).

This lack of understanding around race and what it means to be White in America and the lack of recognition of the privileges and advantages conferred to Whites as a result of White racism, are a condition of Whiteness. Whiteness is “a broad, collective American silence. The denial of White as a racial identity....allows quiet, the blankness, to stand as the norm” (Hale, 1997, p. x). The quiet, norm of White racism, Whiteness and privileges for Whites at the expenses of people of color remains “one of the most difficult problems facing the United States today”. (Feagin & Vera, 1995, p. 1).

*Whiteness and the “invisible knapsack” of White privilege.*

“This belief of “White as norm” is so engrained it remains obscured from view, as natural as the air we breathe but do not see” Lopez (2003, p. 80)

Whiteness, the condition of being White in America, and White privileges are “like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks,



visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10) and can be seen as a package of unearned assets, which can be counted on by Whites but are meant to remain oblivious (McIntosh, 1989). This invisibility of Whiteness for Whites is well documented (Applebaum, 2008; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; Marx, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1989; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Sleeter, 1994, 2001; Sleeter, Delgado, & Bernal, 2004; Tatum, 1992; Vera, Feagin, & Batur, 2001). “Even thinking about Whiteness takes a deliberate conscious effort that most White Americans simply never attempt” (Marx & Pennington, 2003, p. 32). Most White Americans don’t think about their Whiteness at all or else think of it as neutral or positive category (Vera, Feagin, & Batur, 2001). Due to this social positioning and the advantages afforded, Whites have the power to ignore and neutralize the impact of race when it benefits them (Wildman & Davis, 1997) and these benefits, advantages and privileges afforded to Whites allow them to be less cognitive of race, racism, White racism and Whiteness.

This complacency and lack of understanding about race and White racism and the diminished view of Whiteness is the basis for terming all Whites racist (Scheurich, 1993, 2002a). Bergerson (2003, p. 59) concurs, “to the extent that Whites ignore their race and its privileges, we are racist” or as King (1991, 1997) asserts, “dysconscious” racist. Dysconscious racism refers to the lack of critical consciousness and thought regarding race and the “uncritical habit” of the mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things (King, 1991, 1997). This tacit acceptance of Whiteness, White privilege and

White racism becomes a dysconscious means of ignoring the intricacies of race and racism embedded in America's racist history, systems and behaviors (King, 1991; Lopez, 2003). This lack of understanding and recognition of race and White racism and the tacit acceptance of Whiteness by Whites is profound and it affects the perceptions, beliefs and decisions of Whites, including White educators and White principals.

Hickman (2004) states a principal's individual perceptions, beliefs, and experiences are highly influential in their development of school policies and practices on meeting the needs of all students. White principal's perceptions, beliefs, actions and decisions have a profound effect on the public school system, the teachers and the students (Hickman, 2004, Leithwood, 2008; Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2012). However, because White principals tend to see themselves as non-racial (Aveling, 2003; King, 1997; Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Marx, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Ogbu, 1978), tend to not see race or Whiteness (Applebaum, 2008; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; McIntosh, 1990; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Sleeter, 1994, 2001; Sleeter, Delgado, & Bernal, 2004; Tatum, 1992), and are reluctant to recognize and struggle to understand how racism works (Aveling, 2007; Heinze, 2008; Lopez, 2003; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1989; Rains, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Weiler, 1988; Young, 2011; Young & Laible, 2000), it makes equitable perceptions, decisions and actions quite elusive.

Thus, many White principals still struggle to recognize race and racism in schools (Aveling, 2007; Cahill, 1996; Feagin & Vera, 1995; McIntosh, 1992; Nieto, 2004; Rains, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000) and those that do tend to acknowledge overt acts and tend

to emphasize its insignificant nature (Ryan, 2003; Scheurich, 1993). To compound the issue in public school, these beliefs and understandings around race and racism are often informed by the very structure of our principal leadership preparation programs (Lopez, 2003) and principal preparation programs across the nation do very little to equip future educators and leaders with the cogent understanding of race and racism (Howard, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Young & Liable, 2000). So, White educators and White principals remain reluctant to recognize and confront their Whiteness (Applebaum, 2008; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; Marx, 2004; McIntosh, 1990; Rasmussen, 2001; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Sleeter, 1994, 2001; Sleeter, Delgado & Bernal, 2004; Stanfield, 1985; Tatum, 1992; Vera, Feagin, & Batur, 2001; Young, 2011) and the chance for equitable perceptions and decisions for all students is “trapped” and not allowed to exist inside the schoolhouse.

Before we can more successfully move to an equitable education for all students, regardless of racial markers, principals, White principals, must demonstrate and argue convincingly for the need to purge these “old beliefs” and perceptions (Gooden, 2002) and start to create a better understanding of what it means to be White in America. However, “Whites must exert a special effort to become deeply aware of their own...racism” (Ryan, 2003, p. 85) and “getting administrators to abandon their conservative tendencies so that they will be able to acknowledge and challenge systematic racism in their schools...will not be easy” (Ryan, 2003, p. 161).

If White principals are “to recognize the powerful ways race and racism shape and affect access to equity in schools and can impede efforts towards the closing of

achievement gaps”, then the first “necessary and critical step” begins with “their own emotional and intellectual undertakings about their own racial identities and histories, their privilege, and the presence of institutional racism “ (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, p. 1347). White principals need to explore and better understand their own race, Whiteness and racism and think about what it means to be White in their school (Denevi, 2004). White principals need to interrogate their race and their own Whiteness or the status quo of White racism and the systematic racial biases of the public school system will continue to quietly persist, undisturbed.

#### *Whites meet Whiteness*

“One change in direction that would be real cool would be the production of a discourse on race that interrogates Whiteness. It would be just so interesting for all these White folks who are giving Blacks their take on Blackness to let them know what’s up with Whiteness.” b. hooks (1990, p. 54)

“There is little doubt that White administrators face a difficult task confronting Whiteness and attacking institutional racism, but, there is no denying they play an important role in the battle and can have a decisive effect on racist and anti-racist practice in their respective schools” (Ryan, 2003, p. 158). However, before White administrators can start to disrupt the discourse within their schools and begin to address biased institutional systems, they must first recognize and better understand their own race and begin to recognize their own prejudices. The recognition and knowledge of their White race has been espoused as a pertinent first step to the any future growth as an anti-racist educator (Howard, 1999). There is a “compelling need for White people, particularly

White educators in the United States, ...to look within ourselves and realign our deepest assumptions and perceptions regarding the racial markers that we carry, namely Whiteness” (Howard, 1999, p. 40).

For White principals this “realigning” of thoughts, assumptions and perceptions regarding race and Whiteness is affected by their own racial identity. This is critical because research has shown that more advanced White racial identity and White identity orientation is positively related to the beliefs and attitudes of race, racism and White privilege (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008; Helms, 1990, 2005; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). Therefore, more knowledge and understanding of the levels of White racial identity and White identity orientation White principals’ hold will provide valuable information in the quest to better comprehend and address the systematic racism in our public schools today. Thus, a review of White racial identity development (Helms, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2005) and the closely related White identity orientations (Howard, 1993, 1999) theories follows.

#### *White Racial Identity Development*

“No matter how unbecoming my Whiteness may be made to appear, I cannot “un-become” White.” Gary Howard, (1999, p. 111)

Racial identity is defined as “ a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perceptions that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1990, p.3) and theories of White racial identity development are firmly established in the literature (Carter, 1990, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2005; Helms

& Carter, 1990; Tatum, 1992). The most frequently cited pioneering scholar of White racial identity development (WRID) is Janet Helms. She identified two main racial identity phases with three stages within each phase. Phase one, the abandonment of racism, includes the contact, disintegration, and reintegration stages. Phase two, the defining a non-racist White identity, consists of the pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion<sup>2</sup>, and autonomy stages.<sup>3</sup>

Whites must become aware of his or her Whiteness and accept it as personally and socially significant in order to develop a White racial identity based in reality (Helms, 1990). For Whites to achieve a healthy sense of White racial identity there are two major developmental tasks, “the abandonment of individual racism and the recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism” (Tatum, 1997, p. 94) and “(T)hese tasks occur over 6 stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy” (Tatum, 1997, p. 94). A brief review of the phases and stages of White racial identity is presented to help better understand where White principals lie in regards White racial identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Helms (2005) with increased empirical data has eliminated the immersion/emersion stage/status; for this study I will briefly address the stage in the literature review

<sup>3</sup> Although Helms (1995) has more recently altered her terminology from stages to statuses to better demonstrate their dynamic capabilities; however, for stylistic purposes, this study will use the original term stages.

### *Phase One - Abandonment of Racism*

In phase one, the abandonment of racism, the initial stage, contact, is described by attitudes of oblivion to the implications of racial classification and diversity. Whites pay little attention to their racial identity (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997). Whites in this stage do not perceive any uniqueness in their racial classification and due to their racial unconsciousness, they do not recognize or acknowledge differences in the experiences of Whites and people of color. Helms (1990) contends that it is through interactions with other Whites and real or vicarious "contacts" with people of color that Whites in this phase begin to develop either fear and intimidation, or interest and curiosity about racial out-group members or the "others" but they often perceive themselves as color-blind, without prejudice and unaware of their assumptions of "others". It is here in the contact stage that many White educators sit, undisturbed and unaware.

In stage two, the disintegration stage, Whites begin to become aware of racism and White privilege and attempt to start to make sense of the, sometimes harsh, realities of racial diversity. Individuals at this stage struggle to understand the issues and conflicts they experience between their naive "raceless" beliefs, and their emerging White racial group identity. They acknowledge differences in how Whites and people of color are perceived, and they are aware that a White racial classification affords a different, more privileged, status over other races. Further, in this stage, the new awareness of racism and White privilege often produces discomfort and difficult emotions like guilt, shame and anger for Whites (Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008; Helms, 1990) and this may lead to a tendency to suppress information related to White

racism and privileges (Helms, 1995). However, “once the “silence” is broken, the cycle of racism becomes increasingly visible” (Tatum, 1997, p. 96) and “although social pressure from friends and acquaintances to collude, to not notice racism, can be quite powerful” (Tatum, 1997, p. 101), it is here in the disintegration stage that the long journey to become an anti-racist educator may begin as “it is very difficult to stop noticing something once it has been pointed out” (Tatum, 1997, p. 101).

For Whites, the third stage, reintegration is characterized by the idealization of their racial group and the denigration and intolerance of the “out-group” (Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Helms, 1995). This allows Whites the psychological comfort of not confronting the moral dilemmas of racial privilege that have become obvious to them in their cross racial interactions during the disintegration stage (Helms, 1990). In this stage, interactions with racial out-group members do not extend beyond the superficiality of the contact stage and “the feelings of guilt or denial may be transformed into fear and anger directed towards people of color” (Tatum, 1997, p. 101). Because the pressure to accept the status quo is so strong and the system of privileges is so seductive, many White folks get stuck in reintegration just thinking and the conflict between noticing racism and not noticing racism generates significant internal conflict (Tatum 1997). Although not inevitable, “most White people who speak up against racism will attest to the temptation to slip back into collusion and silence (Tatum, 1997, p. 101).

Although arduous, Whites who are able to move forward from the reintegration stage in phase one into phase two will begin to develop a non-racist identity but this is a challenge that cannot be underestimated.



### *Phase Two - Defining a Non-racist White Identity*

“As a White person’s understanding of the complexity of institutional racism in our society deepens, the less likely he or she is to resort to explanations that “blame the victim. Instead, deepening awareness usually leads to a commitment to unlearn one’s racism, and marks the emergence of the Pseudo-independent stage” (Tatum, 1997, p. 106).

In phase two, defining a Non-racist identity, the first stage is pseudo-independence. In this stage Whites are on the brink of developing healthy White racial identities and have an intellectual understanding of equality and the unfairness of racism. Although sometimes epitomized by the “guilty White liberal”, Whites in this stage have an intellectual understanding of racism as a system of advantages but don’t quite know what to do with it (Tatum, 1997) and may focus on “saving the disadvantaged” (Gushue & Constantine, 2007). However, in doing so Whites are, subconsciously and sometime inadvertently, continuing to act in ways that reflect an underlying belief in White superiority (Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Tatum, 1997). This presents a challenge for a healthy racial identity because as Tatum (1997, p. 107) says, “we must be able to embrace who we are in terms of our racial and cultural heritage, not in terms of superiority or inferiority”.

The second stage, immersion/emersion represents further growth as Whites “seek to understand the personal benefits associated with whiteness” and are “aware of his/her own personal biases, leading the individual to take action against racism” (Groff & Peters, 2012, p. 1). In this stage Whites begin to reject inequality while they perceive a

need for a racial identity that understands and accepts their Whiteness. Whites in this stage seek a healthy White racial identity that is not based on denigration of racial out-group members and embrace a racial identity that is based on a non-idealized notion of Whiteness, and a desire to "truly tackle racism and oppression in its various forms" (Helms, 1993, p. 62). It is in this stage Whites "seek a personal, nonracist definition of Whiteness as well as their initial quest to incorporate racial activism into their lives" (Gushue & Constantine, 2007, p. 322). It is in this stage White administrators and educators can begin to disrupt common discourse in public schools and begin to dismantle the affect the systematic racism and racial biases that exist inside the schoolhouse.

In the final stage, autonomy, Whites forge a personal identity based on critical understanding of what it means to be White in the United States. They consciously reject White identities that insinuate privileges are inherently owed to Whites and they take up an activist role towards eliminating racial inequality. Autonomy is characterized by an "increased desire for social activism" (Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008, p.236) and an "activist stance that seeks to end social inequities and surrender the privileges gained from racism" (Gushue & Constantine, 2007, p. 322). It is here in this stage that Whites often engage in work to alleviate the various forms of inequality and oppression. Many Whites will even choose to learn more about racial out-group members in order to better understand them and their own White racial identity. It is at this point that Whites "incorporate their newly defined view of Whiteness as part of their personal identity" and

the “positive feelings associated with this redefinition energize the person’s efforts to confront racism and oppression in daily life” (Tatum, 1997, p. 112).

Thus, it is here, in the autonomy stage, where all White educators should aspire to reside. In the autonomy stage, White racism and institutional biases are recognized and confronted and the attack on systematic racism may begin. It is through this recognition and confrontation that equitable solutions for all students can emerge and can begin to change the course of the public school system.

However, few Whites reside in phase two and even less reside in the last and most advanced stage of phase two, autonomy (Carter, 1995; Helms & Carter, 1992), but, Whites can ascend through the phases and stages. Most Whites reside in the oblivious, contact stage, so it is there that we must begin the expedition. The contact stage is defined by White color-blindness, racial erasure and general racial indifference. Thus, understanding one’s own perceptions and beliefs about race and racism is an important early step in the development of a healthy non-racist White identity (Helms, 1990; Howard, 1999; Theoharis & Haddix, 2007). Helm’s (1990) states, “The (White) person must become aware of her or his Whiteness, learn to accept Whiteness as an important part of herself or himself and to internalize a realistically positive view of what it means to be White.” (p. 55). It is through the examination of their own perceptions and unconscious belief systems that White administrators and educators can begin to understand where they lie in terms of White racial identity and begin to move from phase one, the abandonment of racism, to phase two, defining a non-racist White identity, and beyond.

Determining where White educators lie in terms of their White racial identity is valuable because the relationship between White racial identities and racist attitudes has been found to be positive and significant by several researchers (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms & Juby, 2004; Constantine, 2002; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Pope-Davis and Ottavi, 1992, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001; Tatum, 1994, 1997) and many researchers have provided strong empirical evidence that supports the positive effect of addressing White racial identity development (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Helms, 1990; Neville et al., 1996; Tatum, 1994, 1997; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). Thus, by examining the perceptions of race that White principals hold, educators and researchers can begin to better understand where the White principals lie on the continuum of White racial identity and begin to address their increased development.

Gary Howard's (1993, 1999) work on White identity orientations offers a similar, yet alternate, view of racial identity for Whites. His work, akin to Helm's White racial identity, provides another framework to examine where White principals lie in terms of their racial identity. A summary of the White identity orientations is presented for a better understanding of White identity.

### *White Identity Orientations*

Through his extensive work with educators and in multicultural education, Gary Howard (1993, 1999) constructed a model of White identity orientations designed to support, extend and compliment the White Racial Identity Development work of Helms (1990, 1995), Tatum (1992) and Carter (1995). Similar to Helms, Howard's (1999) model identifies three distinct, semi-linear, orientations of White identity: fundamentalist,

integrationist and transformationist. Each orientation is described by three modalities of growth with three indicators each – how Whites *think* relative to the constructs of truth, Whiteness and racial dominance; how Whites *feel* relative to self-awareness, racial differences and racism; and how Whites *act* relative to teaching, management and cross-racial interactions. Through the three modalities and the nine indicators, “the White identity orientations model provides a means of tracking White educators progress in our thoughts, emotions and behaviors relative to Whiteness” (Howard, 1999, p. 99).

However, like White racial identity, before we can begin to track any progress or growth we must first determine where White principals lie in terms of their White identity orientations. Thus, a review of the White identity orientation follows.

#### *Fundamentalist Orientation*

A Fundamentalist orientation is characterized by a denial of Whiteness and a general ignorance of Whiteness and race, similar to the contact stage of Helms’ (1990) White Racial Identity Development model. Whites fundamentalist are literal and linear thinkers, shun ambiguity, defenders of the notion “White is right”, and rationalize and legitimized White dominance (Howard, 1999). Fundamentalists feel emotionally connected to color-blindness, deny differences in races and preach assimilationist doctrine to their students of color. Because of these actions, thoughts and feeling, White fundamentalists are “either overtly or covertly racist in their cross-cultural interactions” (Howard, 1999, p. 101) and “powerful experiential catalysts are required to dislodge individuals from their fixation in the fundamental orientation” (Howard, 1999, p. 102). Thus, similar to White racial identity development models, most White educators tend to

reside, many unconsciously and unabashed, in this, the earliest orientation, fundamentalist, but if a catalyst appears, a more positive White racial orientation can be achieved.

### *Integrationist Orientation*

An integrationist orientation is distinguished by an acceptance of racial differences and the initiation of the interrogation of Whiteness. However, these acceptances of differences tend to be rather shallow preferring to think, “we are really all the same under the skin” (Howard, 1999, p. 103). Although they have begun to interrogate Whiteness and acknowledge White dominance, they remain ambivalent in their conclusions and fail to grasp the significance of its continuing effects in social situations (Howard, 1999). Integrationists may have acknowledged their complicity in racism at an intellectual level but continue to distance themselves at an emotional level where feelings of racial superiority still linger (Howard, 1999). Due to the initial interrogation of Whiteness and the lingering feelings of superiority, White integrationists often demonstrate the emotional confusion, ambivalence and dissonance associated with Helms’s disintegration stage of White racial identity (Howard, 1999, p. 103).

While White integrationists are aware of the personal struggles students of color have experienced, they have yet to fully grasp the systematic and institutional nature of social injustice. Thus, Whites integrationists tend to underestimate the change necessary to achieve real equity and social justice but they are moving in the right direction. The integrationist orientation begins to erode once Whites become self-reflective regarding White dominance, realizing the “we” of our social institutions must be truly and

thoroughly inclusive and they begin to question the legitimacy of our institutional arrangements and outcomes that continue to perpetuate white dominance (Howard, 1999). Whites must begin to understand Whiteness and the institutional and systematic nature of racism before they can move onward to become a transformationist.

### *Transformationist Orientation*

Transformationist Whites “through their willingness to probe deeper terrain of racial identity, ...become self-reflective, authentic, and anti-racist in their understanding of Whiteness” (Howard, 1999, p. 106). In this orientation Whites are guided by respect and empathy, are committed to social action and are advocates for marginalized people. They have acknowledged, critiqued and rejected the legitimacy of the current forces of dominance and racism and their multidimensional view of reality, race and Whiteness manifests a pedagogy that fosters equity, inclusion and empowerment for all of their students (Howard, 1999; Banks & Banks, 1995). Transformationists are “committed to social action”, they “participate in the liberation of others” and “acknowledge that they themselves are being liberated as well” (Howard, 1999, p. 106). Sleeter (1995) notes, “becoming actively involved in working to dismantle racism will change a person’s life “ and transformationists, “realize they can not dismantle White dominance without fundamentally altering their own White identity”(Howard, 1999, p.106). Thus, transformationist have experienced a profound shift in their understanding of the world and themselves and “having changed themselves, they are passionate about educating other Whites and committed to working with colleagues from all racial groups to overcome the social arrangements of past and present dominance” (Howard, 1999, p.

108). White transformationist educators are committed to social action and the dismantling of White racism and Whiteness.

Transformationist orientation is the goal for all White educators and place where equitable education for all can flourish but it will be a journey for most Whites. For Whites, “the road to a transformationist White orientation is neither straight nor easy...neither mapped nor well traveled. It is a journey fraught with ambiguity, complexity and dissonance” (Howard, 1999, p. 115), but one that allows Whites to deeply engage Whiteness (Howard, 1999). Although, the transformationist White identity orientation remains a critical goal for White educators many never get there or even get close. Instead, most Whites still reside in the earlier White orientation phases, integrationist and fundamentalist (Howard, 1999).

If White principals are to move towards a transformationist orientation and/or the Autonomy stage of White racial identity development (Helms, 1990), they must first take an introspective look into their own perceptions and beliefs regarding race and Whiteness. Like Howard (1999) declares, “it is important for each of us to understand our own position and level of awareness vis-a-vis the categories of race...it is important we become self-reflective regarding our White identity” (p. 84). Thus, it is important for White educators start to acknowledge, recognize and evaluate their own race and their level of White identity orientation and, for most White educators, that means working in the early stages of White identity orientation (Howard, 1999).



*Do White Principals Know They Are White?*

“We must all be able to embrace who we are in terms of our racial and cultural heritage, ... Educators especially, need to be able to do this, because it is only when we have affirmed our own identities that we are truly able to affirm those of our students, White and of color.” Clark & O’Donnell (1999, p. 61)

Research has shown that more advanced White racial identity and White identity orientations are positively related to the beliefs and attitudes of race, racism and White privilege (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms & Juby, 2004; Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008; Helms, 1990, 2005; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). Once armed with better knowledge and an increased understanding of where White principals’ lie, “there is much we can do to encourage our White colleagues....on the road to social justice, healing and positive racial identity” (Howard, 1999, p. 109). The examination of the perceptions White principals hold on race will allow educators and researchers a chance to better examine their unconscious belief systems and better understand their levels of White identity. It is important to understand White principals’ levels of White identity and White identity orientation because higher levels of White racial identity and White orientation have been shown to positively affect their beliefs and attitudes on race, racism and White privilege (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms & Juby, 2004; Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008; Helms, 1990, 2005; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001).

However, without the deliberate challenge and conscious examination of their own perceptions and beliefs regarding race, most White principals and “most White

Americans simply never attempt” to examine race or Whiteness at any significant level (Marx & Pennington, 2003). Without this introspective examination, many Whites principals will remain where they traditionally sit, at low levels of racial identity and perpetuating systematic racism and the status quo, oblivious and-unaware of their role.

White principals’ ability to hold and operationalize an equitable plan for all students is limited without a deep understanding of one’s own race and one’s own racial identity. However, the racial identity, hidden perceptions and unconscious belief systems White administrators hold around race affect both their understandings around race and their decision-making. If White principals do not understand their perceptions and beliefs surrounding race, the privileges it affords, and the challenges it present to students of color, then, an equitable educational plan is difficult if not impossible to formulate and operationalize.

Complicating the issue further, some researchers have found that Whites educators have difficulty owning positive and equitable perceptions around race and students of color further hindering their own racial understanding. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) describe negative, non-equitable patterns of thinking by White educators as “equity traps”. Are equitable perceptions for students of color trapped inside the lack of understanding Whites have about race? A closer look at the potential “equity traps” for White principals is presented to provide information and clarity.

### *Equity Traps*

Equity traps are non-equitable patterns of thinking and behavior around race and students of color that “trap” the possibilities for creating an equitable education for all

and lead to “dysconsciousness”. Dysconsciousness, “is the uncritical habit of the mind, including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions and beliefs, that justifies inequities” (King, 1997; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 135). This dysconsciousness prevents White educators from recognizing and believing in the possibility that all students are capable and deserving of an equitable education. These equity traps prevent Whites educators from equitable thoughts and can prevent White educators from believing their students of color can be successful learners and are often reinforced by individual and group perceptions, communications and actions. Through the examination of White teacher’s perceptions (see McKenzie, 2001), McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), conceptualized four equity traps: deficit view, racial erasure/color-blindness, avoidance and employment of the gaze, and paralogic beliefs and behaviors. These equity traps present a framework to better understand where the perceptions and beliefs of White principals surrounding students of color and race may reside. To increase the understanding of the equity traps a deeper examination of each is presented.

#### *Trap One - Deficit View*

The concept of deficit thinking is derived from a genetic pathology model, which contends that inferiority is transmitted by genetic code. Ryan (1971) first discussed deficit thinking in his book, *Blaming the Victim*. Ryan (1971) explains that blaming the victim, in the sense of the entire social structure, is an ideological process espousing a set of ideas and concepts from systematically motivated, but unintended, distortions of reality. Within the educational arena, the deficit thinking model perceives students of color as less competent, less skilled, less knowing, in short, less human (Ryan, 1971) and

is grounded in classism and racism offering counterproductive educational prescriptions for school success (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997).

*Historical models of deficit thinking.*

Valencia (1997) stated that the historical models of deficit thinking, which include hereditarianism, social Darwinism and eugenics, were held from about 1890 to 1930. Their predecessor, environmentalism, was prevalent as early as the sixteenth century. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas were, by European standards, highly primitive (D'Souza, 1997). The inhabitants of the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa had dark skin and were considered uncivilized and inferior. This deficit model was termed environmentalism. The dark skin color of the inhabitants was seen as a symbol of inferiority. Environmentalism began to fade as people of different colors appeared throughout the new world and not just near the equator.

Hereditarianism arose after the collapse of environmentalism. Europeans easily accepted the theory of hereditarianism due to their long tradition of regarding noble and base qualities to be hereditary. This tradition was part of the justification of the monarchy and aristocracy of their nations. Thus, people of color were thought to inherit inferior qualities. Hereditarianism also encompassed social Darwinism. Social Darwinism held the beliefs that Whites were innately more intelligent than people of color. The social Darwinism arguments were used in part to justify the slavery and oppression of the African people.

In 1860, the work of Francis Galton helped to further the genetic inferiority theories. Galton wrote a thesis positing that Whites were more intelligent than people of color. This principle provided a framework for the 1920's eugenics movement that encouraged selective breeding to improve the human race (Adams, 1990; McKenzie, 2001) and selective reduction of a large numbers of births among the less desirable. In the 1920's, the less desirable people of the United States were Black. However, the eugenics movement began to unravel in 1926 with Piaget's advanced notion that intelligence is based on both genetic and environmental factors. In the 1930s, the depression suddenly caused Whites and Blacks to both become impoverished hindering the theory even more. Finally, in the 1940's Hitler's Nazi movement in Germany essentially ended the eugenics movement in the United States as many Eugenists did not want to be associated with a similar movement.

In the late 1960's, the genetic deficiency model started to rekindle. Shuey (1966) conducted IQ tests and concluded that the differences in scores between Whites and Blacks were due primarily to genetics. Likewise, Jenson (1969) posited that the gap in intelligent tests scores between Blacks and Whites was due mostly to genetic influences. The genetic deficiency model and theory that intelligence test gaps are attributable to genetics has also recently been discussed with the publication of Herrnstein and Murray (1994) controversial book, *The Bell Curve*. Helping to prove the model of genetic deficiency of people of color has been quite persistent.

*Culture of poverty.*

The historic models of deficit thinking gave way to the 1960s culture of poverty model. The 1960s were a tumultuous time in the United States. The civil rights movement was experiencing unprecedented vigor and President Johnson had declared a war on poverty. In 1965, the controversial Moynihan report proposed the Blacks students performed poorly in schools due to the deficit family structure and negative cultural influences. Moynihan (1965) stated that the deterioration of the Black family was a leading cause in the deterioration of Black society. The Black family structure and cultural deficiencies were expressed to be the cause of their struggles academically and economically. A person's race or racism was not posited as a cause or factor but rather the culture of poverty was to blame. Lewis (1965) advanced the theory by concluding that people living in poverty create and transmits negative values, norms and social practices from generation to generation. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's the culture of poverty deficit model was prevalent and it continues to survive today.

*Deficit thinking persists and prevails.*

Many of the current perceptions and beliefs about students of color have their roots in the historical models of deficit thinking. The deficit thinking model is deeply embedded in educational thought and practice, pervading schools that serve children of color (Valencia, 1997) and is self-perpetuated among both school leaders and educational constituents (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). "Deficit thinking has remained the dominant, unchallenged paradigm that school district leaders have used to explain to others or make sense to themselves of the persistent, pervasive and disproportionate underachievement in school of children of color (Skrla & Schuerich, 2004, p. 238). Not surprisingly, the

deficit thinking model has even had a recent resurgence in the last few years with the publishing of several articles and books espousing racial differences in intelligence and supporting a general deficit thinking model (see Lynn, 2005; Lynn & Vanhanen, 2002, 2006; Payne, 2005; Rushton, 2006; Rushton & Jensen, 2005). The persistent and pervasive patterns of deficit thinking trap principals and educators into believing students of color are inferior and deter them from moving towards equitable treatment for all students. Many researchers have shown White educators across the United States to have strong deficit-based perceptions and conceptions of students of color (Conchas, 2006; Garza & Garza, 2010; Howard, 2008; Lewis, 2003b; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Moses & Cobb, 2002; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Pollock, 2005). Howard (2008) found White educators and teachers tended to perceive their students of color as less capable and often lower their expectations. Lyman and Villiani (2004) concur, “too many educators see only children (of color) with problems and limited potential instead of children with promise” (p. 5). From their study of White educators, Garza and Garza state, “they (White teachers) persistently expressed that children at this school were innately less competent, less intelligent, less capable, and less motivated...these teachers never identified their perceptions and beliefs or the school system as a problem” (p. 202) and Howard (2010) concurs, “White educators possess an ‘assumption of rightness’, a belief that poor performance by students of color is a result of deficiencies in the student or family, not in the educational structure”(p. 119). White educators deficit-thinking and low expectations for students of color further demonstrate their lack of recognition and understanding of race and racism.

Research has shown that successful school leaders who understand the complexities of race tend not to engage in deficit thinking stereotypes (Lyman, 2008; Lyman & Villiani, 2002, 2004). However, the quest for equitable achievement for all students is trapped from the beginning if White principals believe or start from the premise that students of color are deficient or somehow lacking. Therefore, it is valuable to examine and understand White principal's perceptions and patterns of thinking on race so we can start to recognize and dismantle the persistent and pervasive equity trap of deficit thinking.

#### *Trap Two - Racial Erasure and Color-blindness*

The second equity trap is “racial erasure” and this concept is derived from the work of bell hooks (1992). Racial erasure is “the sentimental idea...that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same” (hooks, 1992, p. 12). To erase race or to take a “colorblind” stance is to prevent the notion of racism. A colorblind stance is one that “disguises (sometimes deliberately) or normalizes (sometimes unwittingly) relationships of privilege and subordination” (Guinier & Torres, 2002, p. 42) and not only legitimizes the erasure of culture and histories of people of color but it also keeps Whiteness invisible as the de facto norm (Feagin, Vega, & Batur, 2001). By refusing to acknowledge color and by acting as though race can be erased from the equation, White educators are denying their own race, Whiteness and racism.

Denying race and Whiteness is unfortunate because many qualitative studies have provided evidence illustrating the dangers of acting as if race and color don't matter



(Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2001; Ditomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003; Feagin, 2001; Lewis, 2004; Milner, 2012b; Tijerina-Revilla, Stuart-Wells, & Jellison-Holme, 2004; Ward-Schofield, 1997). These studies declare that ignoring race and color not only legitimates the erasure of the culture and histories of people of color, but it also keeps Whiteness invisible and “ignoring color and race, especially when understood to be virtuous, can lead (White) people to presume that if overt manifestations of racism are absent, if everyone just seems “to get along,” then racism has been eliminated” (Applebaum, 2006, p. 34).

In a sense, if there is no color and no race then Whites cannot possibly be racist and are able to avoid any guilt or negative feelings associated with their race and racism. As a result, for Whites, a discourse of racial erasure and colorblindness has become normative and people have become incoherent in talking about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2002) and as Pollack (2004) says, Whites have become “colormute”, consciously deleting race labels from talk. “(M)any of us (Whites) omit references to race in our conversations, acting as if race does not matter (Schultz, Buck & Niesz, 2005). Racial erasure and colorblindness are prevalent and powerful, easily trapping equitable perceptions and thoughts of Whites.

Milner (2012b) reminds us, “color blindness can emerge in some destructive ways in the classroom especially through/in curriculum and instructional practices” (p. 869) and in a study of White teacher’s perceptions of student of color, several teachers in the McKenzie (2001) study stated they were colorblind and that they did not see race. White teachers speaking of student of color stated, “I see the human and the person as if skin

was the other color maybe and try to respect them just as much” (McKenzie, 2001, p. 215), and, “I don’t look at their color. I don’t judge them in any way based on that” (McKenzie, 2001, p. 210). However, as Guiner and Torres (2002) remind us, “it is impossible to see without color” (p. 42). White educators want to erase color and race from the equation and propose that the real cause of the educational difficulties are economic in nature, implying that poverty and not race are the primary factors in the difficulties of the students of color. However, White educators cannot afford to embrace colorblindness in their practices with students of color because White educators and their students’ identities, experiences and behaviors are intricately shaped by race (Ladson-Billings, 2009, 1994; Milner, 2010, 2012b), thus, making the recognition of race and color highly important.

Even though their race matters very much in the “social pecking order” in which power, prestige and respect are distributed (Dalton, 1995), many Whites do not see themselves in racialized terms (Averling, 2003; Bergerson, 2003; Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Marx, 2003, Marx & Pennington, 2003; Ogbu, 1978), so racial erasure and colorblindness are convenient methods for White educators. Harper and Patton (2007) add, “instead of tackling the realities of race, it is much easier to ignore them by embracing colorblind ideologies . . . it creates a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and the privileges of Whiteness can be maintained” (p. 3). Erasing race and refusing to see color may be effortless for many Whites but it does come with a cost (Bonilla-Silva, & Forman, 2001; Ditomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Tijerina-Revilla, Stuart-Wells, & Jellison-Holme, 2004; Ward-Schofield, 1997), as race

and color do matter in the “pecking order” of our society (Dalton, 1995; West, 1995).

Colorblindness and racial erasure are limiting equity traps that allow White educators to trivialize color and avoid the negative connotations of race and racism altogether. Before White principals and educators can fully recognize racism in all its forms and start the journey to becoming an anti-racist educator they must begin by evaluating and recognizing their own perceptions on race and color. Thus, the examination and illumination of White administrators’ unconscious belief systems and perceptions of race and racism are warranted first step in the dismantling and avoidance of this highly limiting and detrimental equity trap. As Thompson (2008) reminds us quite succinctly, “in order to oppose racism we must first notice race” (pg. 11) and if White principals are colorblind and don’t see race, then racism remains invisible too. Examining the perceptions and unconscious beliefs systems of White principals’ have on race and color allows researchers an opportunity to learn where White principals’ stand in terms of recognizing color, their own race and the racial identity of others.

### *Trap Three - Avoidance and Employment of the “Gaze”*

The third equity trap to examine is avoiding or employing the “gaze”. The concept of the “gaze” is taken directly from the work of Foucault (1977). Foucault (1977) describes the gaze as surveillance for the purpose of controlling behavior. A person or group in power can use the surveillance of others to monitor and norm behavior. Foucault (1980) states,

There is no need for arms, physical violence, and material constraints to gain control of people, thoughts and their behaviors. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze that each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point

that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself. (p. 155)

The gaze is a way for people and institutions in power to monitor and maintain control over others. The power of the gaze lies within Western, well-to-do heterosexual, capitalist, White male perspective and all the “others” are impacted by this power and are objects of the gaze (Maoz, 2006; Prichard & Morgan, 2000). A discussion of the employment and avoidance of the gaze follows.

*Avoiding the gaze.*

The gaze of surveillance and control can be a strong one. In a study of immigrant and migrant workers from Mexico in the United States, Stephen (2004) found, that “undocumented workers and even for those who have ‘papers’ have been living in the world of surveillance and limited personal liberties for quite some time”, that “being watched continues to be one of the most difficult parts of their work experience”, that they “fear an increase in surveillance” and that “surveillance...is a major part of the experience of Mexican immigrant workers” (p. 98). Thus, for these people of color, avoiding the gaze of law enforcement, government and even the average American, is part of the daily routine in the United States. The surveilling gaze is powerful and often used to intimidate and more readily maintain behavior and the status quo.

Thus, many, including Whites, try to avoid surveillance. In a study of White teachers, one teacher working at a high minority elementary school stated they had come to teach at the low-income school because they were not “watched” as much there as they were at the more affluent primarily White elementary school they had taught at previously.

I can slide here where I couldn't slide on the west side. If I walk out 10 minutes early everyday I don't have the slightest bit of guilt about it...I'm killing myself during the day. You know, there are little things like that that I can fudge on because I know they need me here. They will put up with all kinds of shit from me before they fire me...You would have to go a pretty long way to get them mad at you here. Just showing up is like, thank you, thank you, thank you, ... you wouldn't do that on the west side of town. (McKenzie, 2001, p. 141)

Parents and principals at the high minority school rarely questioned her teaching strategies and supervision was less strenuous. While at their former, more affluent White elementary, the parents and administration had watched the teachers much more diligently. The gaze of the principals and White parents can be avoided by teaching at a low-income, high minority school where parents and principal s are just happy teachers show up. The expectations and gaze at the high minority school are less extreme and less critical and by moving to the high minority school, the teachers were able to avoid the gaze and the surveillance of the middle and upper class White parents and the White school principals. Thus, avoiding the gaze helped the White teachers, some unknowingly, furthering the educational dilemma of the students of color and helped to “trap” educational equity.

*Employment of the gaze.*

The employment of the gaze is another way to normalize behavior and maintain the status quo. The gaze and surveillance have become normalized in the Western world as the exercise of power progressed from physical punishments to more disciplinary practices (Foucault, 1977), and the power and disciplinary practices of surveillance, have found their way into many public institutions, including the public education system (Raible & Irizarry, 2010).

Thus, when an educator speaks out or tries to disrupt the current White hegemonic discourse, others may employ their gaze to counter the remarks and normalize the situation. In McKenzie's (2001) study, when Lauren, a young music teacher, spoke out positively for the students of color and their families in the school she was constantly rebuked and questioned by the other teachers in the group. Lauren stated, "you start to respect a lot of things, that are not maybe in your culture" (p. 170-171) and another teacher immediately questioned, "*you* respect the kids for their behavior?" (p. 171). To employ their gaze, the other teachers in the group countered her remarks with negative examples of the families and students. The other White teachers were employing their gaze to let Lauren know that disrupting the current status quo was not going to be easy and was effectively not acceptable. In-group settings the use of the gaze can be quite powerful.

Thus, by both employing and avoiding the gaze, the White teachers can fall into traps that prevent them and the school from fully attaining equity. By avoiding and employing the power of the gaze, Whites are able to avoid the surveillance of others to maintain the status quo and utilize it to normalize and control behavior, thus helping to support the current White hegemonic discourse and limiting the opportunities for equity.

#### *Trap Four - Paralogic Beliefs and Behavior*

Paralogism comes from the Latin word *paralogismus* and the Greek word *paralogismos* meaning unreasonable (Merriam-Webster, 1998). Paralogism is the process of drawing an unreasonable conclusion from a set of premises that do not logically warrant that conclusion. In other words, paralogism is a self-deception based on

false, non-logical reasoning. An example of paralogism from the educational world comes from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), which recalls a White teacher rationalizing her beliefs and behaviors as she says,

The anger of the kids has caused me to act this way; I've gotten sucked into their anger. I mean I've never spoken to kids the way I have spoken to them this year. I mean it's just, I am just this far out of control in my classroom on more days than I want anybody to repeat. (p.624)

The teacher is justifying her own negative behavior by saying that her "kids", her students of color, had caused her to act that way. Further, the teacher states that she had never acted that way before inferring that it was the students of color and their anger that had caused her to act as she did towards them. That conclusion is false and illogical as elementary students do not cause adults to act in any way; adults make decisions and choose how to behave. So, her conclusion suffered from paralogism and shows racial prejudice.

The power of this trap lies in its ability to capture many negative perceptions, beliefs and behaviors towards students of color. Logically, adults know that their behaviors are not caused by anyone other than themselves. Children's behavior can add stress to the situation and can be difficult to handle at times but school children do not have the power to make adult teachers act or behave in negative and prejudice ways. However, by blaming the students of color the teachers ostensibly created a trap, or wall, which prevents them from fully expecting equitable classroom behaviors and outcomes from their students of color. By falling victim to paralogic beliefs, the teachers are

trapping themselves from the reality of the situation and denying their best efforts, and thus, their ability to create the most equitable education for their students of color.

Logically, White educators must be able to discuss, recognize and understand their own perceptions and belief systems about race before they will be able to address, at any significant level, any paralogic thoughts and behaviors they may demonstrate. Since White principals almost exclusively come from the teacher ranks, they to must understand their belief systems and perceptions in order to address any patterns of inequitable thinking or dysconsciousness.

#### *Are White Educators Perceptions Trapped?*

White educators have difficulty recognizing and understanding race, their own Whiteness and racism (Applebaum, 2008; Aveling, 2007; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; Marx, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1990; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Sleeter, 1994, 2001; Sleeter, Delgado, & Bernal, 2004; Tatum, 1992; Vera, Feagin, & Batur, 2001). These difficulties work to prevent equitable educational thoughts for all students. Although there are many viable explanations for these difficulties, the equity traps presented provide a viable framework to begin to examine the perceptions White educators and principals hold about race and racism. If White principal's equitable perceptions and equitable patterns of thinking and behaving are "trapped", then it is imperative that they are illuminated and addressed. Without this recognition and sometime uncomfortable look inside their own perceptions and beliefs regarding race and racism, we all should expect the public school system, with a large majority of White educators and White principals (NCES, 2009a, 2009b,



2013), to continue to produce the same disheartening results. If however, White principals are able to identify and understand these equity traps, then the possibility of removing or interrupting these negative perceptions and negative patterns of thinking is dramatically increased.

However, research shows many Whites are minimally cognizant of their White racial identity and orientation and are reluctant to recognize their race, racism or Whiteness. Thus, the negative patterns and perceptions around students of color and race continue. It is when White educators and White principals move forward through their own White racial identity and White identity orientation that they may begin to effectively address the racial equity issues permeating our public school system.

A closer examination of effective White school leaders and the role of the principal are presented to provide an increased understand of what White school principals can do to better address racism and racial equity within the public school system.

### *Efficacious White School Leaders*

#### *White Principals, Please Stand Up*

“We Whites need to study and report how being White affects our thinking, our behaviors, and our decisions from a micro, personal level to the macro, social level. We need to make White racism a central, self-reflective topic of inquiry ...” (Scheurich, 1993, p. 9)

From 1990 to 2010 the percentage of White students in public schools across the United States declined from 67% to 54% and conversely during in the same time period

the percentage of students of color in public schools across the United States increased from 33% to 46% (NCES, 2012). However, in the midst of this great demographic change in the public education system in the United States, most principals are still White. During the 2011-12 school year, over 81% of the principals in public schools across the United States were White (NCES, 2013). Thus, White principals play an important role in addressing the many educational gaps and in creating an equitable education for all students. White principals make decisions and choices that affect students of color every day. Yet, the failings of the public school system they are a part of are inescapable. The public school system and its mostly White principals continue to lead and make decisions that result in systematic failures and racial inequities for students of color. Are White principals consciously or unconsciously helping to maintain this institutional bias against students of color? What can White school principals do to work for equity in their schools?

#### *Autonomous and Transformative Leaders*

“(A) big step would be for Whites to admit that we are racist and then to consider what to do about it.” (Wildman & Davis, 1997, p. 31).

Higher levels of White racial identity and White identity orientation have been shown to positively affect Whites’ beliefs and attitudes on race, racism and White privilege (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Hays, Chang, & Havice, 2008; Helms, 1990, 2005; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). However, “no one is born with an integrated sense of racial identity” (Howard, 1999, p. 85) and if one, “is a White person in the United States, it is still

possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality” (Helms, 1990, p. 54).

In spite of this, there is a path to a greater White identity and more advanced views of racism and White privilege for White principals. White principals must first acknowledge their own race and then begin to recognize the many forms of racism, including White racism.

Helms (1990, 1995) acknowledges that a “healthy” White racial identity emerges when Whites abandon their conscious and unconscious racist attitudes and then progress on the arduous task of moving towards a highly racially aware non-racist identity. At the highest levels of White identity and identity orientation, autonomy and transformative, Whites have recognized and abandoned White supremacy and White racism and have progressed to create a non-racist positive White identity (Helms, 1990, 1993; Howard, 1999). Whites school leaders have a long journey to travel if they are to arrive at the transformative and autonomous levels of White identity that are needed to most effectively attack equity and racism in our public schools but it is attainable goal.

In the final phase of White identity development, autonomy, Whites define their positive White identity. Autonomous White school leaders are characterized by a new and positive definition of their own Whiteness and the affects it carries. Thus, White autonomous school leaders show a willingness to shun the benefits and the privileges White racism affords them and take an activist stance to end social inequities (Gushue & Constantine, 2007). This willingness and ability to recognize and act, coupled with the acknowledgement of institutional racism, allows White autonomous school leaders to actively, “engage in activities to resist the many manifestations of oppression” (Howard,

1999, p. 93). These activities could include staffing patterns, hiring procedures and course placements of students but autonomous White school leaders attack all forms of racism and oppression.

Further, transformative school leaders seek to understand diverse points of view, challenge White dominance and become anti-racist in their understanding of Whiteness (Howard, 1999). White transformative school leaders are committed to social action and the dismantling of the dominant White paradigm. Transformative leaders, like autonomous leaders, are champions of changing the status quo and “are advocates for those people who have been marginalized by the forces of dominance and oppression” (Howard, 1999, p. 107). Thus, transformative and autonomous leaders are committed to social action and the dismantling of White dominance and the status quo. This focus on the oppressed and marginalized students within the institution, the dismantling White dominance and the status quo and the commitment to social action and change, represent a monumental switch from most White’s view of the world.

The profound shift in the understanding of the world, themselves and the rejection of the White status quo allows highly racially identified White school principals the ability and motivation to actively foster equity, interrogate institutional structures and procedures, and become increasingly aware of all forms of oppression. This level of awareness, behavior and action towards institutional oppression and racism, along with the dismantling of White dominance helps to provide the essential racial equity and “social justice” back to the school institution and system. The public education system in the United States yearns to have its White school principals fighting for the marginalized

and oppressed and working towards social justice within our institutions. Social justice and racial equity within our public school system should be a prominent goal for all principals, but can White principals work towards and achieve social justice in their schools?

### *Social Justice Leaders in Education*

“Social justice ingrained into the very being of the social justice leader means that each decision, every aspect of that principalship, and all details of the school are examined and seen from a social justice perspective” (Theoharis, 2008, p.20)

The literature is ubiquitous with many definitions of social justice and social justice leaders (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Gerwitz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Theoharis, 2007; West, 1999). Gerwitz (1998) advances the idea that social justice challenges the status quo and assails exclusionary processes and arrangements within organizations and institutions. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice “as the exercise of altering these institutional and organizational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (p. 162).

Social justice educational leaders must first seek to recognize the status quo or the “institutional arrangements”, then alter, and “assail” the institutional racism that exists. In conjunction, Cornel West (1999) describes social justice leaders as, “public intellectuals who are willing to engage in self reflection in order to uncover, as well as construct strategies to combat the rituals and forms of institutionalized oppression these

organizations perpetuate” (West, 1999, p. 551). Theoharis (2007), who studied social justice leaders and principals, states social justice educational leadership means, “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision” (p. 223).

Thus, the definition of social justice and social justice leadership that will inform this study draws from Gewitz (1998), Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002), Theoharis (2007), and West (1999) who all advance social justice and social justice school leaders as ones who clearly position institutional oppression, exclusionary practices and marginalization as a critical and central concern within their schools. In the public education system students of color are oppressed and it is the institution and public school system itself that marginalizes and excludes them. Thus, any White principals willing to fight an arduous battle for social justice must do so by examining and then working against the status quo. However, there are positive examples of social justice school leaders, many of whom are White, that are successful in their fight against institutional oppression and racism.

Theoharis and Haddix (2011) studied successful social justice school leaders and White principals. Each successful leader made commitments to social justice and all experienced success in areas of student achievement, staffing and staff capacity, the structuring of the school and improving school culture. However, the study revealed that initially these leaders had to develop, “their own consciousness, knowledge, and skills in dealing with issues of race, leading and making connections between issues of race” (p. 1333). Thus, White principals fighting for social justice will have to first start with their

own consciousness and their own perceptions around race. A deep understanding of one's own race is necessary before a White school leader can begin to thoughtfully recognize and discuss racial issues within the school. Before the White principals can become successful social justice leaders they must first work on their own consciousness and their own knowledge and skills around race and racism. They must also build their skills around addressing and discussing race and racism before they will be able to begin the enormous task of disrupting the status quo within their schools and the aversion that is inevitable.

Theoharis (2010) reminds, "(T)hese leaders described this resistance as "enormous," "never ceasing," and "often unbearable." (p. 339) and "breaking the silence" of the status quo can be difficult (Rapp, 2002; Theoharis, 2007, 2010). Making the task even more unlikely and difficult, many school leaders, and most White school leaders, are not prepared to engage in transformative leadership practices with an emphasis on leading for social justice (Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Tooms & Boske, 2010). Rather, they are traditionally prepared to understand their roles as managers of the system (Boske, 2012) and not critical architects of the school institution. Thus, examining institutional racism, attacking oppressive practices and marginalizing procedures are not an inherent ability and skilled task for most White school leaders.

Further, even after the recognition of the institution racism and its many faces, White social justice educational leaders must also be willing to work against any and all permutations and forms of oppression. Young and Liabe (2000) concur, saying "(S)chool leaders must be prepared to work against all forms of oppression that exist in

our schools today and to work for social justice” (p. 375). Once noticed, the status quo and standard practices must be declared and addressed, but, Theoharis, (2007) warns, these “principals seeking social justice do not fit the traditional mold, and their approaches are not always accepted by colleagues” (Theoharis, 2010, p. 339). Thus, White social justice school leaders will face strong resistance from both inside and outside of the institution. Therefore, White social justice principals will need to have a highly evolved White racial identity, a strong understanding of Whiteness and the privileges it affords, and a keen eye for the many tentacles of institutional racism. All of these skills will be needed and even then resistance and opposition will be fierce.

Social justice school leaders will face obstacles but once the journey begins there is evidence of success. Research has documented school leaders' successful efforts to affect change and address social justice issues within our public school system (see Carter, 2000; Eiler & Camacho, 2007; McGee, 2004; Schuerich & Skrla, 2003, Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2010, 2011). Highly racially identified, knowledgeable White social justice school leaders can make a profound difference in their schools but as our current situation shows, there is no time to delay the start of this process.

These few success stories indicate White principals can interrupt and disrupt the status quo and can successfully address and assail racial inequities within their schools. White social justice principals can make a great difference within their school systems and White principals, “...must be at the front of the line in transforming schools into more equitable and just places” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250). White social justice principals



must stand up to make the critical difference they are able to make if we are to have a profound affect on the racial inequities still present in our system today.

*Role of the Principal and the Principal's Influence on the Schoolhouse*

“as goes the principal so goes the school” (Cubberly, 1919, p. 351).

The principal is the leader of the school. Principals make many decisions everyday, some with long lasting consequences that affect students' lives. Teacher recruitment, hiring and evaluation, instructional emphasis, course and class schedules, student course assignments, the setting of the school vision, mission, and goals, and the school culture all have an **affect** upon the school and upon the students. Sergiovanni (2001) posits, “Principals are important! Indeed, no other school position has greater potential for maintaining and improving quality schools” (p. 99). This view of the importance of principals is not a new one. In 1970, the United States Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity (US Senate, 1970) reached he following conclusions,

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school...It is his leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of the teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become...if the students are performing to their best of their ability one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success. (p.56)

A principal's leadership has been linked to the overall climate of the school and the climate of individual classrooms (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Griffith, 2000; Leithwood, et al., 2004), the attitudes and classroom practices of the teachers (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Leithwood, et al., 2004), a student's opportunity to learn

(Duke & Canady, 1991), and the delivery of high-quality instruction and instructional coherence (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Newmann, et al., 2001). Further, research strongly suggests principals are a key ingredient to improving a school's performance and overall educational outcomes, especially in schools serving students of color (Leithwood, et al. 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2008, 2010; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Given this overarching influence within the school, it is no surprise that principals also effect student achievement. There is significant research that suggests that the principal position has a positive relationship to student achievement (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Riehl, 2000; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Scheurich, 2002b; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Marzano (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 69 previous studies on principal leadership and student achievement and concluded principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools. Kaplan (2005) concluded similarly that principal quality is linked statistically and practically with student achievement. A high quality principal can have a profound affect on the school climate, the teaching staff and student achievement. The principal has the capacity to make the necessary decisions to positively affect student achievement and the ability to set a climate for the equitable education of all students. It is through this equitable educational climate and these necessary decisions that the educational gaps and inequities between students of color and their White counterparts may finally be addressed and diminished.

The principal position is significant and has the potential to exercise profound change in a school. Our struggle for more racially equitable schools across America would benefit from more highly racially identified White principals and more White principals working towards social justice. Marshall and Oliva (2006) stress that the mission to strive for a more equitable and socially just society begins with educational leadership. So White principals, please stand up and lead!

*White Principals, Equity and Social Justice*

The principal position has potential and opportunity to exercise great change in the schools they lead. However, most Whites and White principals have difficulty even recognizing their own race and even more of a challenge addressing racism, Whiteness and the racially biased outcomes in their schools. However, there is some research to suggest that White school leaders can actively address social justice and positively address racial equity in their schools. .

White principals are the still the leaders of most of the public schools across America. Thus, if the public school system is racially biased and failing students of color, White principals play a role in both the current situation and in any future solutions. However, since the public school system itself is reproducing these disproportionate outcomes, no one actor or one individual principal will be able to eliminate all the discrepancies system-wide. “Decades of “good leadership” have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 253). Thus, White principals cannot be expected to simply ride into a school on a “white horse” and correct all the institutional biases and inequities by themselves but they can make a difference.

Research suggests principals can make a positive difference and can affect the outcomes of all students in their school (see Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Leithwood, 2008; Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Autonomous and transformative leaders recognize Whiteness and institutional racism and are better prepared to fight for racial equities within our schools. White social justice school leaders have shown the willingness and abilities to affect profound change in the racial outcomes of their schools (see Carter, 2000; Eiler & Camacho, 2007; McGee, 2004; Schuerich & Skrla, 2003, Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2010, 2011). Thus, hope for a new generation of White social justice school leaders is warranted but not guaranteed against White dominance and the powerful status quo. Although, there is research to suggest White principals can positively affect the racially biased institutional outcomes, positively affect social justice within a school and have a beneficial effect on institutional racism, there is much to still learn and do before this occurs across America.

Before White principals can address social justice, institutional racism, observe White racism within their schools, or even realize their own elusive internal racism and Whiteness, they must first recognize their own White race. However, most Whites and White principals have great difficulty recognizing their own race and even more of a challenge addressing racism in all of its forms. Principals are leaders of their schools and their perceptions, behaviors and actions affect those schools and all of the students.

However, there is limited research around White principals' perceptions of race and racism (see Ryan, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000). In order to better understand where

White principals are on this journey towards more socially just public schools there must be more research into where White principals stand in terms of their White race and Whiteness. Thus, a closer examination of White principals' perceptions of race and racism is warranted to better address and attack the unyielding institutional racism of the public school system in America.

A summary of the literature review follows.

*Let the Journey Begin - A Conclusion of the Literature Review*

This chapter provided a review of the most pertinent literature related to this research project. Research shows that there is a pervasive problem in successfully and equitably educating all students and especially students of color, in the public school system in America. Students of color perform at lower levels than their White counterparts on many achievement test indicators (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; College Board, 1999, 2009; Ferguson, 2002; Kobrin, Sathy, & Shaw, 2007; Loveless, 2012; Marayuma, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003, 2010; Noguera, 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg, & Dion, 2005a, 2005b; Walker & Bridgeman, 2008), they are more likely to be expelled, suspended or dropout (Cardenas, Montecel, Supik, & Harris, 1992; Deviney & Cavazos, 2006; Gordon, Paina, & Kelcher, 2000;), they are over-represented in special education and lower level classes (Blanchett, 2006; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Losen & Oldfield, 2002; Oakes, 2010; Reglins, 1992; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994), they are underrepresented in higher level, gifted and talented and college-track courses (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Ford, 2006; Marayuma, 2001; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 1994; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, &

Deshler, 1994), they frequently are educated in schools with less resources and less experienced teachers (Kozol, 1991; Lee, 2004; Shields et al., 2001; Urban Teacher Collaborative, 2000), and they are frequently taught by teachers that hold negative perceptions of them (Carr, 1997; Cross, 2003; Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Washington, 1982; Weissglass, 2001).

The public school system still has many gaps to fill in order to educate all students equitably. Educators and principals tend to attribute the inequities of the public school system to economics, family settings, the students' home life, cultural deficiencies, and the students themselves. Rarely, does the analytic lens get turned back inside the school to analyze the public school institution and its participants. Most of the principals and teachers in public school system today are White (NCES, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). With a growing percentage of students of color (NCES, 2012), the White educators must be prepared to offer an equitable education to all students. However, research shows that many White educators do not fully see race or racism and do not understand the ways that it works (Aveling, 2007; Heinze, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1989; Rasmussen, 2001; Ryan, 2003; Weiler, 1988) and don't even see themselves as White (Delgado & Stefanic, 1997; Feagin & Vera, 1995, Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Ogbu, 1978; Stanfield, 1985).

These limitations and the lack of understanding around race, racism and Whiteness support the findings that Whites tend to have little to no White racial identity (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990; Helms & Carter, 1992) and a low level of White identity

orientation (Howard, 1999). This lack of White racial identity and low level of White identity orientation makes recognizing and understanding racial issues and racism quite indistinguishable for White principals. Therefore, acknowledging and addressing racially biased student outcomes and institutional racism is quite problematical for White principals. As a result, the battle for equitable schools and equitable outcomes for all students is often quite elusive.

Complicating matters further, many White educators hold negative perceptions of students of color and do not fully understand the ways in which their beliefs and attitudes affect their student's achievement (Carr, 1997; Cross, 2003; Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Washington, 1982; Weissglass, 2001). In addition, research suggests that White educators' perceptions and beliefs may be trapped in patterns of thinking that limit their ability to administer a fair and equitable education to their students of color (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). These "equity traps" White educators hold, need to be recognized and brought to the forefront of the discussion by White educators, including White principals. without a better understanding of their own perceptions of race, Whiteness, and racism, White principals will continue maintaining the status quo and will continue to perpetuate the institutional racism within our public school system.

Fortunately, there is research to indicate the benefits of the development of a White racial identity (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Constantine, 2002; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Helms, 1990; Neville et al., 1996; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1992, 1994; Silvestri & Richardson, 2001; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). White principals

that do develop high levels of White racial identity and White identity orientations have a greater understanding of race, racism and Whiteness. Autonomous and transformative White school leaders have strong non-racist identities that recognize their own Whiteness and engage in activities and decision that fight for the oppressed. They recognize and are willing to work against institutional racism and resist the plentiful manifestation of oppression that plague our schools. Autonomous and transformative school leaders work for more socially just schools by recognizing policies and procedures that oppress, setting an equitable climate for all, students and staff, hiring a high quality and racially diverse staff, placing all students in the appropriate and challenging courses, and raising student achievement. The public school system in America needs more White principals working towards social justice in our schools and promisingly research has shown that White principals can have success attacking and addressing institutional racism and social justice in their schools.

Social justice school leaders recognize institutional oppression and are able to discuss and address various issues of race and equity. Effective social justice school principals were shown to improve their schools by raising student achievement and acknowledging and altering oppressive procedures, attitudes and policies (See Theoharis, 2007). Successful White social justice principals identified and removed oppressive curricular programs, addressed race and equity in all its manifestations to increase staff capacity, and improved the overall culture and climate for all students. This understanding of race and racial oppression and the willingness to attack institutional



racism indicates effective White social justice leaders have higher levels of White racial identity and White identity orientation than most Whites and most White educators.

Thus, we need to cultivate and develop more socially just and highly racially identified and oriented White school leaders. However, before we can develop more socially just White school leaders and move them along towards the autonomy stage and transformative orientations, we must first determine where our current White school leaders lie in terms of their cognition of race and racism. So, “rather than blaming White educators for the sins of past domination, lack of recognition of race and the dearth of racism, we need to start where they are” (Howard, 1999, p. 110) and we need to assess where they stand now. In most cases with this means starting in the early stages of White identity development and White identity orientation and moving then moving towards a positive non-racist White racial identity and White identity orientation. However, before White principals can move towards a higher level of White racial development they must initially better understand, “their own consciousness, knowledge, and skills in dealing with issues of race” (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, p. 1333).

In this study, White principals’ perceptions, conscious and unconscious beliefs systems around race and racism will be illuminated and examined. Principals are leaders of the schoolhouse and they have the position and power to challenge the current White hegemonic discourse within the public school system. In order to move towards a more equitable outcome for all students, White principals must begin by first recognizing and comprehending their own perceptions regarding race, racism and Whiteness. Without this first step, White principals will continue down the same path, perpetuating the same

status quo and no equitable gains for students of color should be expected. Since most public school leaders are White (NCES, 2009a, 2013), a serious and in-depth examination and discussion of the perceptions White principals hold about race, and racism is warranted and needed. White principals, please stand up!

Chapter three will present the research methodologies and design of the proposed study. Data collection strategies, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness and limitations of the study will also be presented.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology**

#### *Introduction*

Chapter three restates the purpose of the study, provide details of the research methodology, the theoretical framework, the research design, describe the participants in the study, and explain the procedures for the data collection and data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perceptions selected White principals hold about race and racism. There was a positive relationship between leadership and student achievement (Leitwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Riehl, 2000; Scheurich, 2002b) and the kind of quality leadership we have will help determine, for better or worse, the kinds of schools we have (Sergiovanni, 1992). Principals are leaders in their schools and their perceptions have consequences within that school. This study illuminated the perceptions selected White principals hold about race and racism in order to provide new knowledge in the struggle to close the persistent achievement gap and help provide insight into to the questions surrounding the systematic inequities of the public school system.

#### *Research Questions*

The following research questions served to guide the study:

- 1.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race?
- 2.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about racism?

3.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about the race and the principalship?

### *Research Design*

#### *Methodology*

This study adhered to the tenets of qualitative research. Qualitative research espouses the idea that individuals in interaction with their world socially construct meaning and that the world, or reality, is not a fixed, single, agreed upon or measurable phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world (Merriam, 2002). Using qualitative methods, this study sought to construct meaning through the prolonged discussions and interaction with the participants (Creswell, 2003). It was through these prolonged interactions that the researcher further understood the meaning the participants have constructed about race and racism.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

This study utilized critical theory as a general theoretical framework. Critical theory emerged from the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1920s. The scholars at the Frankfurt school “focused on emerging theory, practice and inquiry with historically grounded understanding of contemporary social, political and cultural issues” (Hebert & Beardsley, 2002, p. 204). Critical theory was further advanced by Habermas (1970, 1989), “who believed human beings are unnecessarily oppressed by implicit cultural ideologies” (Hebert & Beardsley, 2002, p. 204). Thus, the goal of critical theory is to

recognize these unconscious belief systems that individuals hold, and to allow freedom from those beliefs by providing alternatives through self-reflection and social action. Critical theorists work for social justice by constantly questioning and challenging cultural and societal values and practices (Crotty, 1998). Critical theory “maintains the spotlight on the power relationships within society so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p.157). Critical theorists are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race (Fay, 1987).

Further, this study was informed by Critical White Studies (CWS) framework to structure the examination of the perceptions the selected White principals hold about race and racism. Critical White studies works to critically examine Whiteness as it applies to notions of institutional racism (Feagin, 2000, Feagin & Vera, 1995; Fredrickson 2002; Scheurich & Young 2002), dysconscious racism (King, 1997), and privilege (McIntosh, 1997; Rains 1998). In CWS, Whiteness can also be conceptualized in relation to racial identity (Pennington & Brock, 2012). Helms’ (1990, 1995) theory of White identity development utilizes unique stages, beginning with the contact stage where Whites experience a heightened, somewhat uncomfortable, awareness of their Whiteness in the presence of people of color and finally progressing onto an autonomous White identity, whereby Whites are comfortable addressing race in positive and progressive ways. All of these areas can be viewed as a means of situating Whites in critical constructions based on power and position in various contexts (Pennington & Brock, 2012).

Utilizing this critical lens in the design of the study allowed the analytic examination of the perceptions the selected White principals hold of race and racism. The critical lens allowed the silence on race within our public school system to be confronted and allowed a critical look at the perceptions selected White principal hold on race and racism.

By “maintaining the spotlight” (Crotty, 1998) on the perceptions White principals hold, this study examined the unconscious belief systems they hold in an effort to understand their constructions of race. A critical inquiry approach was best suited for this study because critical theory “analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within society, identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 307) and the recognition of the unconscious beliefs systems White principals hold on race allowed all the freedom to critique these beliefs. Further, CWS was utilized to better examine the role race and racism play in these belief systems. CWS believes “the current way society is organized is unjust” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.21) and, therefore, seeks to examine the ways the constructs of Whiteness ensure social, political and economic benefits for Whites. Thus, CWS allowed for the analytic examination of the perceptions and constructs of race among a selected group of White principals.

#### *Design of research and study*

Case studies are a valuable tool for understanding human behavior in depth (Stake, 1995) and they provide researchers with an understanding of complex social phenomenon while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of everyday

events (Yin, 1994). Using a variety of data collection techniques over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995), case studies concentrate on a particular phenomenon or entity (the case) and seek to describe the phenomenon in great depth.

This study utilized a case study design and more specifically, an instrumental case study design. An instrumental case study is one that “is examined mainly to provide insight into the issue ... and it facilitates our understanding” (Stake, 2005). In this study, I sought insight into the issue of systematic racism in our public school and looked to better understand how White principals’ perceptions of race play a role in this issue. Thus, the use of case study was appropriate.

Further, Patton (1990) differentiated critical cases as “those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things” (p.174). Due to the current state of the public school system and the changing demographics of the United States, it was of the utmost importance to examine the perceptions White principals hold of race and racism. In the United States today the public school system is changing from a White student majority system to a student of color majority system (NCES, 2010; NCES, 2009b, NCES, 2006b). From 1972 to 2008, White students in public school across the United States decreased from 78% to 55.5%, while at the same time the Hispanic student group grew from 6% to 21.7%, Black students increased slightly from 14.8% to 15.5%. Asian, mixed ethnicity groups grew from less than 1% to account for 7.3% of the population in 2008 (NCES, 2010). The perceptions that White principals hold of race and racism may bear significance and importance to the discussion of the formidable educational gaps, persistent achievement

test gap and the systematic inequities of the racially biased public school institution.

Thus, the use of case study was apposite.

### *Participants*

This study used purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to select 5 White principals. Merriam (2002) states, “since qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called purposive or purposeful sampling” (p.12). Patton (1990) argues that it is important to select information rich cases for in depth study. Information rich cases are those cases from which one can learn a great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling.

The participants were White, non-Hispanic, and current principals from a large racially diverse public school district in the southern United States. For this study, a racially diverse district shall denote one with a White student population of less than 40% and large shall equate to a school district with at least 25,000 students. All of the selected principals were asked to confirm they are willing to participate in all aspects of the study.

I examined school district websites to identify the applicable large racially diverse school districts with White principals. Once identified, an application for the approval for research was submitted to the district. After receiving permission to conduct research in Southern ISD, the participants were contacted directly by phone, email or in person. A calendar for initial interviews was created after the selection of the participants. After the



initial interviews a calendar for the remainder of the study was produced in conjunction with each participant.

The University of Texas IRB website was utilized and all of the required documents were completed and submitted for approval before conducting any research with the participants. In addition, an approval from the IRB at the University of Texas at Austin was obtained prior to beginning the research study.

### *Data Collection and Procedures*

#### *Interviews*

Interviews are a traditional source of data collection in a qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) and this study adhered to that **traditional source**. Interviews allowed “access to the observations of others”, the ability to “learn about people’s interior experiences”, and to “learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions” (Weiss, 1994, p. 1). Initially, each participant was individually interviewed face-to-face in an effort to help establish a working rapport (Fontana & Frey, 1994). A semi-structured list of open-ended questions was utilized in the initial interviews. These initial interviews will seek to obtain background information from the participants such as: where they grew up, educational attainment and general life experiences related to race, racism, prejudice and people of color. Additionally, the initial interviews served as a means to build rapport and to ascertain a baseline of the principals’ perceptions and views on the achievement gap between students of color and Whites students, race as a general construct and their initial thoughts on Whiteness. The initial interviews were approximately sixty minutes in length.

Following the initial individual interviews, each participant had one follow-up interview session and a third and final interview session to conclude the study. Each interview session was approximately sixty minutes in length for a total of approximately one hundred and eighty minutes of interview time with each participant.

The second follow-up interview was used to further delve into the principal's thinking relative to race as recorded from first interview. The third and final interview centered on larger themes and participants discussed broader issues of race and education. Further, the final interview was utilized to more richly describe the thinking and beliefs of the principals and helped clarify the perceptions the principals hold about their own race. The final interview also served to provide closure and summation to the process and study.

An interview protocol was utilized for the initial, follow-ups and final interview sessions. The interview protocols included: a heading with the time, place, name of the participant(s), opening statements to the interviewees, structured and open-ended questions with additional probes to extend the questions, and a space for notes and reflections. Additionally, all interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

In an effort to improve credibility and validity, member checking and informant feedback was used in all interviews (Creswell, 2003). During the interviews sessions the researcher regularly restated and summarized respondent information and frequently questioned the participants to determine the accuracy of their responses. Member checks also offered an opportunity for the participant to volunteer new information that may

have cultivated by the review process. Finally, at the completion of the study each of the participants were offered a final chance to review and comment on their involvement and the findings.

These member checks served as a means to review the themes and patterns emerging to further the direction of the research and to verify the accuracy (Glesne, 1999). Any questions or issues regarding the accuracy of the transcripts was discussed and addressed in a timely manner by both the researcher and the participants.

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Organization of Data*

“Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard and read so that you (the researcher) can make sense of what you have learned ... To do so, you (the researcher) must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns and interpret the data you have collected.” (Glesne, 1999, p. 130)

Organizing the data was the first step to analyzing it. Each interview session was transcribed immediately following each session. Copies of the initial, follow-up and final interview session transcripts, along with the protocol sheet, were placed in each participant's individual folder. Approximately three hours of interview transcript per participant was organized and reviewed. Each transcript was filed and organized chronologically by initial, follow-up and final interviews for easy retrieval and access. This organization of data helped to provide structure to the coding.

### *Fluid Process of Coding and the Analysis of Data*

All of the data was initially read and reviewed as the session transcripts become available. The object of the initial reading was to get a sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2003). During the initial reading the researcher wrote notes and started to record thoughts and feelings about the data. These thoughts and feelings were a continuation of the process initiated during the interviews and the process of coding the data was continuous and fluid. Codes are used to retrieve and organize information and Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning” (p. 56). This early and first-level coding was the preliminary process of developing categories.

Initially, keeping the categories broad, the data was sorted according to similar characteristics and, once these categories became “cluttered” and lengthy, they were subdivided into smaller categories or “chunks”. With additional data and subsequent readings the researcher began to categorize the data and locate and label the “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). These chunks of data were then classified and labeled. With additional data, the researcher constantly looked to consolidate similar categories and codes and sought to identify any new emergent codes as well. Since the participants were asked the same semi-structured interview questions the tabulation of the frequency of participant responses within codes and categories was amenable (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Thus, utilizing the categories and codes, the frequency of participant responses were charted and examined. Quantifying or using the frequency of responses to develop categories and codes allowed patterns to emerge from the data with greater clarity

(Sandelowski, 2000). In the end, the tabulation and frequency of responses within the emergent chunks and codes were used to generate the themes elicited from the data.

The themes were presented and discussed in chapter four using rich, detailed descriptions. Multiple perspectives from the participants, quotations and specific examples were utilized in the discussion of the themes.

### *Trustworthiness*

In qualitative research, *trustworthiness* is the term used to denote the level of credibility in the findings and interpretations of the research. Individual interviews will be used in order to provide a rich description of the phenomenon being researched. Interview sessions will be transcribed and subsequently checked by the individual participants for accuracy at the next session. This review provides a means for the participants to insure that the transcripts, coding and emerging themes are accurate and provides credibility to the data (Creswell, 2003).

The study used rich, thick descriptions of the findings to provide enough imagery to contextualize the study in such a way that the reader will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context (Merriam, 2002). These extensive descriptions serve to transport the reader to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experience (Creswell, 2003) and provide transferability of the findings of this study to the reader.

In addition to the strategies outlined above all protocols, questionnaires, coding documents, field notes, and documents used in the study were maintained in a locked filing cabinet. All of these materials were kept in their entirety and contained by the

researcher as a means to protect anonymity and quality of the data. Many of these documents were included in the appendix of the research study. All materials were kept confidential and pseudonyms were used at all times. Those research materials not placed in the appendix will be shredded and destroyed at the termination of the study.

### *Limitations*

Qualitative research is not intent on generalizing its finding but rather to interpret them within a specific context (Merriam, 2002). Thus, this research study has limited ability to be generalized and is contextual to its participants and setting. Instead, the researcher took strides to explain the specific steps and detail of the research so others may attempt a similar project (Yin, 1993, 1994).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is subjective in nature and fundamentally interpretive. This subjectivity allows the researcher to react to the data and themes as they emerge and allows for the construction of new ideas and questions throughout the research. Consistent with the tenets of qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1988) and viewing the “social phenomenon” holistically, will make an interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2003). The researcher did not attempt to control for bias and subjectivity but rather express them openly. Peshkin (1988) states that one’s subjectivities can be seen as virtuous as they are the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique combination of the researcher’s own qualities and the data they have collected.

I am a product of my worldviews and I see the world through my lens. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that I am a White, 46 year-old male, current Texas public school administrator, former educational consultant and a doctoral student in the state of Texas. As such, I have experienced and benefitted from both my maleness and my White race. As a White male, I anticipate the White participants will more freely discuss race with me. However, I am also limited to a degree in my understanding of race and racism as I have lived as a White male in a world and power structure dominated by White males. Thus, it is with these limitations and through my lens that this research study will be conducted and completed.

#### *Summary*

Chapter three presented the method and design of this research study. This study followed the tenets of qualitative research with a case study design. The undergirding theoretical framework for this study was critical theory and more specifically, critical White studies. The study used 5 White principals selected from a large racially diverse school districts in the southern United States. Data collection included a series of three individual interviews with each White principal participant. Data analysis was constant and fluid throughout the research study. The trustworthiness and the limitations of this research study were also depicted.

Chapter four will impart the data and findings from the research study. An introduction and description of the participants will begin the chapter. Next, results from the data collection phase will be imparted. Finally, a summary of chapter four and an introduction to chapter five will conclude chapter four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Study Results and Findings**

#### *Introduction*

The public education system in the United States has many educational gaps to eradicate if it is to equitably serve all students. Principals are leaders of schools across America and over 80% of these principals are still White (NCES, 2009a, 2013). Thus, White principals are a part of the racially biased public education system and will necessarily have to be part of the any future solutions. In an effort to gain more insight this study examined White principals perceptions of race and racism.

Chapter four will begin with a description of the participants followed by the presentation of the results and findings of the study. This presentation of the results and findings will be guided by the three research questions presented in chapter one: 1.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race? 2.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about racism? 3.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about the role of race and the principalship? A concise summary of the findings presented will conclude chapter four.

#### *Study Participants*

This study examined the perceptions of five White principals. These five White principals were all from a large racially diverse school districts in southern United States, Southern ISD. This large racially diverse school district was one of over 25,000 students with a White student population of less than 40%. After receiving permission to conduct research within Southern ISD, information regarding this study and a request to



participate was sent to all working White principals in Southern ISD. The following five White principals were the initial five affirmative respondents. Since all current White principals in Southern ISD had been purposely solicited and prescreened to meet the study requirements for participation, they were selected and utilized for this study (see Fig. 2 below). All of the participants were between 35-45 years of age and all were building principals at the time of the study. All of the White school leaders were public school teachers prior to becoming public school leaders and all received their principal certifications and Master's degrees from colleges and universities in the southern United States. Finally, because my primary ethical concern in this study was to "do no harm" to the participants, pseudonyms will be used for the school district and each of the five principals. These pseudonyms will be used in an effort to protect their individual identities and to protect the identity of the school district.

<b>Principal Names</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Born and Raised</b>	<b>College Years</b>	<b>Adult and Professional Life</b>
Alice	Elementary School	East coast/Southern US	Southern US	Southern US
Beth	Middle School	Southern US	Southern US	Southern US
Chad	Middle School	Southern US	Southern US	Southern US
Dexter	Middle School	Southern US	Southern US	Southern US
Elle	Middle School	Midwest US	Midwest & Southern US	Southern US

*Fig. 2 - Study participants from Southern ISD 2013-14*

It should be noted that one of the participants of this study, Principal Elle had been enrolled in an educational administrative doctoral program at a large state institution in the south for the previous two years. The doctoral program has a focus on race and social justice. Therefore, Principal Elle showed a markedly more advanced understanding of race, racism and Whiteness than did the other four White principals. As such, her

perceptions and responses served as a strong gauge for the analysis of the other four White principals.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Each interview was taped, transcribed, and then organized into summary documents. The data collected through the interviews and transcript review was then organized according to first-level coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and “chunks” or categories emerged (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Finally, the frequency of responses in each “chunk” and categories were tabulated and utilized to identify the emergent themes within this research study (Patton, 1990; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1995).

#### *Limitation and Researcher Bias*

I am a product of my worldviews and I see the world through my own lens. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that I am a White, 47 year-old male, current Texas public school principal, former educational consultant and a doctoral student in the state of Texas. As such, I have experienced and benefitted from both my maleness and my White race. As a White male, I anticipated the White participants would more freely discuss race with me. However, I am was limited in my understanding of race and racism as I have lived as a White male in a world and power structure dominated by White males. Thus, it was with these limitations and through my critical lens that this research study was conducted and completed.

The conveyance of the findings from the critical examination of the perceptions of these five White principals follows.

### *Findings*

For this study, the perceptions of the five White principals were examined utilizing critical theory and Critical Whiteness (White) Studies (CWS) as the theoretical underpinnings. Critical theory is interested in analyzing, critiquing, and challenging the institutionalized power and privileges that benefit White Americans (Giroux, 1997; Roediger, 1999). The goal of critical theory is to recognize unconscious belief systems that individuals hold to allow freedom from those beliefs. Critical theorists work for social justice by constantly questioning and challenging cultural and societal values and practices (Crotty, 1998). Critical Whiteness studies (CWS) theorists believe “the current way society is organized is unjust” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21) and seek to examine the ways the constructs of White society ensure educational, social, political and economic benefits and advantages for Whites. Further, CWS researchers analyze, challenge and critique the systemic structures of White privilege and Whiteness. CWS seeks to critically examine Whiteness as it applies to notions of privilege (McIntosh, 1997; Rains 1998), dysconscious racism (King, 1997), institutional and systematic racism (Feagin, 2000, Feagin & Vera, 1995; Fredrickson, 2002; Scheurich & Young 2002) and racial identity (Pennington & Brock, 2012). In education, this means critically examining and critiquing the relationship of race and racism within the schoolhouse with school leaders, teachers, staff, and parents. Thus, employing this critical White lens in the design of this study allowed for the analytic examination and critique of the subconscious beliefs system these selected White principals held of race and racism. The critical lens allowed

the silence on race and Whiteness within these White school leaders and in our public school system to be confronted and critically examined.

Utilizing the three research questions as a guide, the critical examination of these White principals' perceptions elicited six themes.

- 1.) The White principals utilized deficit thinking.
- 2.) The White principals employed racial erasure and colorblindness.
- 3.) The White principals did not recognize Whiteness.
- 4.) The White principals did not understand systematic and institutional racism
- 5.) The White principals were reluctant to address racial issues.
- 6.) The White principals demonstrated a nascent level of White racial identity.

Guided by the three research questions, the findings of this study and these six themes will be subsequently presented and discussed in greater detail.

### *Perceptions of Race*

All of the participants were asked questions regarding their perceptions and beliefs around race. A deep understanding of race, and for these participants their White race, has been shown to better enable White school leaders to recognize and attack racism and racial inequities. However, when examined critically, the most of the White principals in this study did not have a profound understanding of race or their White race. Instead, these White principals utilized deficit thinking when discussing people and students of color and employed racial erasure and colorblindness when discussing race and their own White race. Further, most of these White school leaders did not recognize Whiteness or the privileges and advantages their White race affords them. These findings

and the first three themes elicited from this study are subsequently discussed in more detail.

### *Deficit Thinking – What Did They Expect?*

Ryan (1971) first discussed deficit thinking in his book, *Blaming the Victim*. Ryan explains that blaming the victim, in the sense of the entire social structure, is an ideological process espousing a set of ideas and concepts from systematically motivated, but unintended, distortions of reality. Within this distorted reality, people of color are perceived in a variety of ways as scant and deficient. Within the educational arena, the deficit thinking model perceives students of color as less competent, less skilled, less knowing, in short, less human (Ryan, 1971). Thus, deficit thinking offers counterproductive educational prescriptions for school success (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997) and unwittingly places undo burden on people and students of color.

Deficit thinking was strongly and firmly evident in the findings of this study. In the following exchange Principal Chad, the most consistent and persistent deficit thinker, demonstrates his perceptions quite well as he discusses the attributes of the Black and White mathematical “achievement gap.” When asked why this “gap” still exists he stated, “Probably economics, education, educational opportunity at home, away from school.” He never mentions resources, teachers, instruction or even the school itself as possible causes for the persistent gap but instead placed blame on the students themselves, their socio-economic status, and their families. When asked to expound on why socio-economic status was a factor he stated,

In that lower economic status, they (Black parents) may be working three jobs as a single parent ... may not be home at night to help that child on their homework

or be able to support them ... I would say that overall, a lot of times, education wasn't as important to them.

He continued to "blame the victim" and their parents and stated that much of the time for parents of color, "education wasn't as important to them". When told data is available to show the Black and White mathematical achievement gaps at all income levels Principal Chad states his deficit view this way.

With those same studies ... I would be interested to see how they also affect economically as well. To see if that's the connection there rather than just race. To see if they're economic, what advantages they have at home. Is there a mom or dad there when they go home at night? Are they working a second or third job to try and keep the roof over their head and provide for their kids? What is the level of importance of education in those households?

Principal Chad continually goes back to socio-economics and the general lack of proper parenting as causes of the persistent mathematical gaps. When explained that even if you take socio-economic status "out" or that you control for socio-economic status, the gap still exists, he defiantly defended his deficit views.

I would be surprised. But also you would have to search farther then to determine what is the factor that's causing the gap between those two races ... Maybe level of education of their parents at home or even their just general trust in education.

Principal Chad relentlessly returns to socio-economic status and family factors as a cause of racially biased student outcomes and continues to "blame the victim". Even when presented with racially biased student data in his school district and school he wants to "search farther" and place the blame on socio-economics, the parents, and the student's home. Not only did he indicate the lack of educational importance of people of color but he also questioned Black parents "general trust in education". He never mentioned the

White students or their parents as they are at the top end of the gap and by his description, not low socio-economic status. This was not true in Southern ISD, but his pattern of thought indicates his perception that most Black students and families live in poverty, have little regard for education and generally don't believe school to be important. Principal Chad demonstrates a deficit view of students of color, their parents and their communities.

Principal Alice gave a glimpse into her deficit thoughts when asked about hiring practices at her school. She stated,

You get thrilled when you see a Black man walk in the door for an interview. Is that right? Is that wrong? I mean I don't know but I think wow! How awesome would it be if this guy actually turns out to be a decent applicant and I can let my children see that a Black man is an educator? I mean there aren't very many. Stuningly, Principal Alice states she is gets excited to see any qualified Black man in for an interview and indicates she is surprised if he is a "decent" applicant. This implies a negative and deficient view and belief of Black men. She goes on further to clarify her deficit views of people of color when discussing a Black parent in her office, she stated, "They're distrustful of the White teacher. They will distrust and I have seen it in action". Discussing another Black parent she stated, "I think they will go as far as they can. I think the only reason she wanted to call the police from our phones is probably she has been in trouble for calling the police from her phone". Principal Alice, speaking of parents of color, insinuates that "they" are distrustful of White teachers and generally untrustworthy. This is a deficit view of their integrity paints a negative hue upon people and parents of color at her school. Finally, while discussing student achievement and racial equity Principal Alice states, "I think that as far as race goes things are equitable. I

would be more concerned with poverty aspect”. She indicates she is concerned with the “poverty aspect” of the educational gaps rather than race. She insinuates that race-wise, student achievement is going well and wants to blame poverty for the racial gaps. This demonstrates a “culture of poverty” deficit view of her students of color. All students, affluent or low income, can and do learn. These deficit beliefs place an “undo burden” on the parents and students of color.

Principal Dexter displays his deficit beliefs when talking about student achievement and racial equity. When asked about the persistence of the Black and White test gap in mathematics he stated, “in a lot of ways it has to do with your economic makeup”. He did not mention school resources or teacher quality but rather that the socio-economic status of the students of color. Expounding on this point he stated,

For whatever reason economically that families didn’t have it or didn’t choose to make that their priority and so then we have an issue with the playing fields not level outside the room. It’s a product of their resources that they have that their other peers may not have available to them.

He added these thoughts about the students of color and their parents and guardians,

They (Black students) hate school because their parents hated school and their parents hated school and look where they live ... I watch the role models they have who are sitting on the front porch at 2 o’clock in the afternoon drinking beer. They don’t have a job. That’s your role model. Their influences are driving them to not see a need in school.

Principal Dexter clarified his deficit views of the students and parents this way,

I have African-American grandparents who are raising their grandchildren who are horrible in math. The parent says well I’m not good at math either, so just do the best you can. When that’s their okay response then we don’t grow and we don’t make any changes for that achievement gap and it just stays there. So I think that achievement gap stays there until it becomes unacceptable. If their



grandparents were telling and when their parents are telling them ... I graduated in eighth grade, we didn't have 12<sup>th</sup> grade and they hear those things, well then there is a less of a priority on the learning that's taking place. Principal Dexter obviously believes people of color and students of color to be reared and schooled in an inferior manner. He even blames the parents for the gap when he says, "When that's their okay response then we don't grow". Obviously parents are not the cause of the persistent Black and White test gap in mathematics.

Similarly, Principal Beth demonstrates her deficit views quite readily in this exchange discussing the factors of the disproportionate DAEP placements for Black males in her district.

The thing that we keep coming back to is that our kids don't know, they need instruction in social skills and socially acceptable behavior. Now, why is that and what we've proposed is that parents are frequently not at home because they're working, struggling to make ends meet. If there's a parent in the home frequently in this neighborhood, it's one parent and a lot of our kids are being raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends and so I think that there has been a lack of social skill instruction, which is carried over to the school.

Principals Beth and Dexter both seem to indicate their beliefs that the Black students and families in Southern ISD are chronically single parented, grand-parented, or fostered. They never mentioned the many White single parent homes but the Black families were perceived to be led by single parents, friends, uncles, aunts and grandparents. The White school leaders even stated these guardians were under schooled, lacked social skills, aged and indicated they were generally "less capable". Therefore, they stated the Black students lacked social skills and are unable to perform properly at school and are often punished for these lack of skills. The deficit thinking of these White school leaders was conspicuous and consistent.

*Summary.*

Deficit thinking is a pattern of thinking that allows these White school leaders and other Whites to perceive people and students of color to be less capable, less proficient and less competent. This study found deficit thinking to be prevalent and consistent throughout. A “culture of poverty” and the belief that many, if not all, students of color are struggling because of the wrath of poverty was the most prevalent deficit thinking “trap”. In addition, the lack of social skills, the chronic lack of educational concern and prowess, and the general negative inclinations for the families, neighborhoods and communities where people and students of color live were also apparent. The perceptions and beliefs of these White school leaders indicated people and students of color were underprepared and less educated. Thus, the people and students of color in these schools must consistently work to overcome these hidden perceptions of their White school leaders.

The deficit thinking model is deeply embedded in educational thought and practice, pervading schools that serve children of color (Valencia, 1997) and was evident in these White school leaders throughout this study. Deficit thinking is a pattern of thinking and an individual belief system that “traps” the mind and prevents equitable racial thoughts from even being considered and seen. Another pattern of thinking or belief system that prevents the proper recognition and acknowledgment of race, racism and racial equity is the erasing of race or colorblindness. However, colorblindness and racial erasure were also evident in the findings of this study. Thus, a discussion of the second theme, the utilization of racial erasure and colorblindness, subsequently follows.

### *These White School Leaders Were Colorblind?*

Many Whites do not see themselves in racialized terms (Averling, 2003; Bergerson, 2003; Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Marx, 2003, Marx & Pennington, 2003; Ogbu, 1978) even though race matters very much in the “social pecking order” in which power, prestige and respect are distributed (Dalton, 1995). The concept of racial erasure is derived from the work of bell hooks (1992). Racial erasure is “the sentimental idea...that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same” (hooks, 1992, p.12). To erase race or to take a “colorblind” stance is to prevent the notion of racism. A colorblind stance is one that “disguises (sometimes deliberately) or normalizes (sometimes unwittingly) relationships of privilege and subordination” (Guinier & Torres, 2002, p. 42). Thus, racial erasure and colorblindness are convenient and common methods for White educators.

However, the fight to attain equitable education for all students in our public education system today we cannot endure racial erasure and colorblindness. Racial markers have power, privileges, and disadvantages associated with them that should not be ignored. Yet, most of the White principals in this study consistently utilized colorblindness and racial erasure when addressing race and their White race.

The participants demonstrated a desire to ignore and erase race and their White race from the discussion. When asked about her White race, Principal Beth stated, “I really don’t even think of myself as being White, I mean that’s my skin color but I don’t know ... for me it’s just a matter of skin color”. Principal Beth prefers to erase her race and not think of herself as White at all. Later, Principal Beth was asked if she ever

thought about her White race and she further clarified her views in this response.

I haven't, not really. For me it's just I am who I am and I don't think that I'm any smarter or any better or that I'm richer or poorer than anybody else of any other different skin color.

When asked about her student's color and race she stated, "I love these kids regardless of who they are and when I look at them I really don't see their skin color". Principal Beth's race and White skin carries meaning and her students' race and skin color do too. Yet she wishes for race to hold no value and says it is just "who I am", "no better or worse than any other different skin color" and that she doesn't see race. She wanted to erase race and hope everyone was equal. She also desired to erase her own White race and be just like everyone else. So, when asked about a specific first memory of being White, Principal Beth replied, "I don't know that I ever had a specific realization that I'm White". This is not a surprising response as Principal Beth stated she doesn't think of herself "as being White" even though her skin is White and she is a White school leader. Principal Beth clearly demonstrated a colorblind mentality and a desire to erase her White race.

Principal Chad showed a more direct approach to his racial erasure and which never waned throughout the study. When asked if he ever thought about his White race he responded, "I don't think of it at all. Not really, no." When asked if he ever thought about having White skin or being White he replied, "not really, no. He was asked what it meant to be White and he stated, "it means that the father, typically, is a White/non-Hispanic. Typically, what I have seen is they have classified by the dad, is a White, non-Hispanic". Clearly, Principal Chad wishes to erase his race from the discussion.

Principal Dexter demonstrated his desire to erase race this way when asked about his White race. “I think there is a point in time in your life where you have to decide. Everyone decides for themselves who they are and it (race) doesn’t necessarily really matter”. He went on to explain what it meant to him to be White, “I guess all it really means is both my parents were White, that’s what I came out”. Similarly, Principal Dexter again demonstrated his yearning to disengage color and race in the following response about the race of students at his school, “I know that it (race) would only matter if you need it matter. I’m a predominantly African-American school but the kids that are most successful to me are the ones that are blind to color”. In this exchange Principal Dexter actually advocated colorblindness and supported the negligible affects of race on his students of color. Further, he stated that race “would only matter if you need it to”. This not only indicated a longing to remove race and color from the equation but also insinuated that “successful“ Black students in his school are the Black students more “open” to being colorblind or the ones who leave their Black race at the door. This, of course, is not possible. Black students, like White students, carry their color and their race always and forever. Principal Dexter reiterated his beliefs that race can be erased and ignored at any time in this statement, “we can just take race out of the picture all together and we can look at the merits of the person”. Again, no one can release themselves from the racial markers they carry and these markers carry significant and real consequences. However, Principal Dexter wants to be colorblind and erase race until “you need it” but that simply is not possible. Racial erasure and colorblindness are evident in Principal Dexter’s world.

Principal Alice's views on race were varied. When initially asked about race she stated, "I know that it is there", but that "it exists in a world that I don't exist in" and "I think generally I kind of feel like it doesn't exist". When asked about her perceptions of a White woman she stated, "I don't know if I have an image" and "they are just the same". When describing an affluent neighborhood in Southern ISD, she stated the residents were "very pale". When asked what color she is she stated, "Oh no, I am White, I am White, I am German to the core". However, when asked what race she assimilated most with she stated, "I know it is really weird, but mostly Hispanics". When discussing an altercation with a Black parent Principal Alice stated, "I see her as a parent ... a parent", trying to ignore her race but acknowledging it all the same. Thus, Principal Alice does see race but seemed to want to muffle or lessen its affects. For Principal Alice, race is ambiguous, not fully erased or ignored but muted and shunned.

Principal Elle, in contrast to the other four principals, immediately addressed race and demonstrated a more advanced understanding and recognition of race. When asked what it meant to be White she responded this way, "it means that I'm part of the dominant social group in U.S. culture. So it's where I don't, I don't think about my Whiteness on a daily basis". Principal Elle addressed color this way when a White teacher, Lisa, stated she saw no color,

No Lisa, you have to see color. If you see Karin has no color your discounting everything she thinks about. Mr. Tealer, you have to see Mr. Tealer as a Black man, in fact a big Black man, because if you don't you're going to discount all of the experiences he just had.

Principal Elle, unlike the other principals, recognized her race and the race of others.

There was no attempt to ignore or remove race from the discussion. She understands that

race and her White race have meaning. As part of the “dominant culture”, she also recognized her Whiteness and the privileges her White race confers. Thus, she demonstrated a deeper level of understanding around race.

In our fight to attain equitable education for all students in our public education system today we simply cannot endure racial erasure and colorblindness. Conversely, White school leaders must recognize race. However, the White principals in this study consistently utilized colorblindness and racial erasure.

*Summary.*

For Principals Beth, Chad and Dexter race is of slight significance and they showed a desire to erase and ignore race whenever possible. Principal Beth felt race was simply a skin color with little real meaning. Principal Chad has no recollection of being White and stated he never thinks about race. Principal Dexter believed “people decide for themselves” who they are and that race and his White race, are simply a factor of your biological parents. He, like the other three principals, saw little importance to race and instead desired to ignore and erase race. For Principal Alice, race was more ambiguous. Although she was able to recognize race she indicated a desire to subdue and mute it whenever possible.

Principal Elle, in contrast to the other four principals, recognized her White race and believed it signifies her status as part of the dominant culture in the United States. For her, race is recognized and embraced and not ignored.

The desire to disregard and expunge race was a pre-cursor to the White school leader’s lack of recognition of the advantages and privileges associated with their White

race. Due to social positioning and the advantages afforded, Whites have the power to ignore and neutralize the impact of race when it benefits them (Wildman & Davis, 1997). Thus, a discussion of the third theme, the lack of recognition of Whiteness, follows.

### *The Elusiveness of Whiteness*

The lack of understanding around what it means to be White in America and the lack of recognition of the privileges and advantages conferred to Whites as a result of their White race are a condition of Whiteness. Whiteness is the condition of being White in America. It is “so engrained it remains obscured from view, as natural as the air we breathe but do not see” Lopez (2003, p. 80). White privileges and advantages are “like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1989, p.10) and can be seen as a package of unearned assets, which can be counted on by Whites but are meant to remain oblivious (McIntosh, 1989). However, for the majority of White school leaders in this study Whiteness remained oblivious and quite elusive.

Since “... all Whites are socially positioned as Whites and receive social advantages because of this positionality ...” (Scheurich, 1993, p.9), these five White school leaders were asked about their perceptions of their White race and its affects and advantages. When asked about the advantages and privileges of being White in America Principal Alice replied this way,

I’m not going to own it. I’m not going to do that. I’m not going to own that and I’m not going, if somebody tried to say, you know, what, I’m going to give you this because you’re White, and I’m going to give you, I’m going to let you cut line because you’re White, and in front of a Black person. I’m not going to do that, do you understand what I’m saying? I’m not going to say if I knew I was



gaining privilege because I was White to the extent that I can control it, I'm not going to ... I don't know that I get a privilege.

Principal Alice stated that the advantage or difference of her White race is something she is "not going to own" and expressed her White race as no advantage. This is not a profound view of the affects of her race. She went on to ponder why people believe she may have an advantage being White seemingly without any thought of her Whiteness, "I've often wondered do I carry myself in that way that I have lived a privilege life? Why are they seeing that? ... Are you kidding me? I used to clean toilets as a private in the army. I know exactly what it's like to work your way out".

Principal Alice once again seemed to be unsure about any advantages White people may receive living in the United States. However, she was clear that she did not want to "own" any of it and preferred to ignore her race. She even pondered why people think of her as a privileged person at all and did not see any advantage to her White race. Principal Alice did not show a profound understanding of the affects of her White race and did not recognize Whiteness.

Principal Chad was singular and straightforward in his understanding of his White race and its influence. When asked if it matters what race a person is he stated emphatically, "No!". When asked how his race affects him as a principal, Principal Chad responded "None". When asked if there were any advantages to being a White principal, Principal Chad offered these succinct replies to thoroughly clarify his perceptions and beliefs about the lack of affects of his White race. "No, I don't believe so ... I'm trying to come up with a specific example ... what might be an advantage? I'm not coming up with one right now". When later asked if there were any advantages or privileges to being

a White person in the United States he replied, “as far as what are the specific advantages, no ... I do not believe so. No, I do not believe it would matter”. He went on to clarify and explain his views this way when asked how his race affects his role as a principal, “my experiences will impact it tremendously, but, I think that’s something separate from race”. When asked if he thought there was any advantage to being White at his school he stated, “No, I don’t”. When asked if there was an advantage to being a student of color at his school he stated, “No”.

Finally, Principal Chad summarizes his perceptions and beliefs about the affect and advantages of his White race and any race, quite succinctly when he stated, “I wouldn’t say that there’s any advantage to any particular ethnicity”. Race matters and Principal Chad’s White race affects his life and his role as a White public school leader but he remained oblivious to Whiteness, his White race and “his knapsack”.

Principal Dexter was asked about race and his White race as well. His responses indicated his views were similar to other White school leaders. He explained his beliefs in the following exchange after he was asked about the advantages of his White race.

I don’t think it makes a difference. I didn’t grow up with some of the hardships that my students and the neighborhood do, but, I don’t know if that has anything to do with being White ... I think that’s a matter of perception ... because I would assume that there will probably be, in somewhere, there would be a Caucasian student who has a predominantly African-American teaching staff or an African-American administrative staff who feel like the African-American kids gets special treatment or vice versa.

On a similar inquiry about the affects of his White race he replied this way.

I don’t know that it’s an advantage. People who have a racism issue, they think of it ... and I think often case race doesn’t play a conscious part. If they were saying that I get an advantage for being White, I don’t think that would have ever been a

thought that went into somebody's mind. I don't think it's an advantage. I think some people, I think, in society sometimes other races feel that White people have an advantage.

In clarifying his views he relayed the belief that it is not an advantage to be White. He went on to say that other races sometimes "think" it is an advantage to be White while insinuating it is not. When asked about the Black and White test gap in mathematics he expressed his beliefs in this response.

In a lot of ways it has to do with your economic makeup of your kids. For whatever reason economically that families didn't have it or didn't choose to make that their priority and so then we have an issue with the playing fields not level outside the room. It's a product of their resources that they have that their other peers may not have available to them.

Finally, when discussing the educational gaps and race Principal Dexter added, "it has nothing to do with ethnicity or racial or anything". He had a limited understanding of race and clearly didn't recognize Whiteness.

Principal Beth was firm in her belief that her White race had little meaning and that her White race made little difference her life.

I don't know. I don't think that it [her White race] made a difference in my childhood. I grew up at the lower end of the spectrum as far as income and so I don't think that it made a difference.

Principal Beth didn't believe her White race helped her or was an advantage to her growing up. She went on to explain her views of the effects of race further in this response about students in her school and district.

I don't think it (race) does matter. I think that our kids are all treated equally here regardless of what their skin color is ... it wouldn't make a difference. It really does not make a difference what the student's skin color is and so here I can definitely say that I believe that it doesn't matter.

Asked further if it would make a difference if a student was one race or another, she stated, “I don’t believe so ... I don’t think so”. Thus, Principal Beth was clear in her view that race and color make no difference to her or her students. She didn’t think being White was an advantage or that it made a difference in her life or in her students’ lives. This lack of recognition of Whiteness by Principal Beth presented a challenge for her because it didn’t allow her to fully understand the power race wields in the world and at her school.

However, towards the end of the study, Principal Beth began to perceive race and its affects differently than her initial earlier views.

I think there are definitely advantages being White and I would say based on our conversation today that there are definite disadvantages for being African-American ... You know when we started our conversations I would have said no, but I think that in actually thinking through these things and these questions that you have asked I think that there probably is a benefit to being White.

Over the entirety of the study Principal Beth’s perceptions around race and its benefits and privileges had started to change. She also showed an alternative view of her own race in the last interview. In the third and final interview she was quite introspective in her response about the racial influence her White race has on her as a principal.

You’re definitely challenging my thinking. Definitely challenging my thinking because before I would have said no, race doesn’t play an affect during educational outcome but thinking that through conversation and some of the data that we talked about, it has to and that’s interesting to me.

Principal Beth demonstrated some growth in her perceptions of race and has begun to see Whiteness in a different and new realm. Initially, when asked about the affects of race Principal Beth stated, “I don’t think it does matter”. However, by the end of the study she

had, “come to realize that I’m probably fairly naive about the discrepancies among the various races” and she realized that she, “really need(ed) to examine things a lot more critically”. This growth and change was not apparent in all of the principals but the maturation was encouraging to see in Principal Beth.

Principal Elle, demonstrated her views around the meaning of race, its overall affect and Whiteness this way.

Race matters and people say that, people hear me say that all the time. We are still living in a very race conscious society. Is it more or less, definitely still there. I don’t know if I could quantify it but it is definitely the factor. It’s just a factor period.

Principal Elle had a lucid understanding of the importance and affects of race. She went on to tell of her perceived advantage as a White person in the United States.

White privilege of course. I have the advantage of not thinking about my race. I have the advantage of knowing if I walk into a store that, and I decided to use credit that, no one is putting a value on me. If I decided to buy a home I’m not worried about if someone will sell the home to me if I’m trying to get a loan. I don’t even think about any of those things in regards to my color being a factor on anything.

Principal Elle recognized that her White race equates to conferred White privileges and once again demonstrated a high level of knowledge around race. This enhanced level of knowledge around race and Whiteness allows Principal Elle to recognize situations and understand racial issues that the other four principals simply cannot see.

#### *Summary.*

When examining the meaning and affects of race four of the principals indicated a limited knowledge of the affects of race and Whiteness. The White school leaders felt race had

only negligible to no influence on one's life. Principal Alice wondered why people think of her as a privileged White person and Principal Chad stated, "I wouldn't say that there's any advantage to any particular ethnicity". Principal Dexter, when asked about the advantages of being White, supported the negligible affects of race by stating, "I don't think it makes a difference". Most of the White school leaders in this study did not insinuate a deep understanding of race or its affects and had difficulty recognizing the existence of Whiteness. Whiteness remained elusive to these White school leaders.

The lack of understanding and knowledge around race and Whiteness affects a White school leader's ability to recognize racism. Perceiving and recognizing racism, in all of its forms and manifestations, is an important factor for White school leaders. Thus, the beliefs and perceptions of the White principals around racial prejudice and racism were examined. The findings and the fourth theme, the lack of understanding of systematic and institutional racism, are subsequently discussed.

### *Perceptions of Racism*

The five principals' perceptions and beliefs about racial prejudice and racism were examined. Initially the principals were asked about the existence of racial prejudice and racism and then a more focused inquiry around racism followed.

Few terms provoke the perplexity and deliberation that the term "racism" does. Traditionally racism is thought to be a particular form of racial prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous perceptions and beliefs about race by members of one racial group and the belief in the superiority/inferiority of people based on this racial identity (Hoyt, 2012; Lopez, 2003; Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1993). For those who adhere to this

definition of racism, racial prejudice and racism are commonly used as interchangeable terms (Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1977, 1993) and for them, overt and covert acts of racial prejudice vividly demonstrate and comprise racism in America. However, using this definition restricts racism to flawed racial perceptions and beliefs and racially “raw, overt bigotry” (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987, p. 46) by one individual or one racial group against another racial group. It does not allow for the real systematic force and persistence of racism in America today.

Thus, a recent revision to the definition and understanding of racism, and the one utilized in this study, relegates racism to exclusively include systematic power and privileges conferred to specific racial groups at the expense of other racial groups (Tatum, 1993; Wellman, 1977, 1993). Meaning racism is systematic and institutional in nature. Thoughts and perceptions that racism is solely comprised of individual overt acts of bigotry and racial prejudice are insufficient and do not infer a profound knowledge of racism in America.

However, the results of this study found the majority of White school leaders did not view racism as systematic or institutional. Instead, they felt racism was a collection of individual behaviors and actions. A deeper discussion of their perceptions of racism, the findings of this study and theme four follows.

#### *Racism is Systematic and Institutional?*

A deep and thorough knowledge of racism and all of its permutations is important for White school leaders fighting for racial equity and social justice. In today’s world, racism no longer comprises only overt acts by racially prejudice people. A more complex

definition and understanding of racism informs this study and consequently, racism is a culturally sanctioned system of advantages based on race (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson –Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Wellman, 1977, 1993) and is oppressive because it is a system that promotes domination and subjugation of people based on their race (b. hooks, 1995). Yet, in this study, the White school leaders understandings of racism were simplistic and they did not view racism as a system of advantages and disadvantages based on race.

When asked about racism Principal Alice stated, “I think racism is counting someone out because of their race or making decisions because or deciding that a race is bad or good”. Principal Alice posited that counting someone out or deciding if a race is good or bad are examples of racism. Principal Alice went on to add another example to clarify her perceptions on racism.

I think racism, I think, are stereotypes and people buying into complete stereotypes and judging that entire race based upon stereotypes. That or even trends that may exist within, like you say Black males are dangerous because that’s a huge population in prison. So all Black males are dangerous.

Principal Alice again stated individuals “buying into complete stereotypes” and judging an entire race as examples of racism. She described individual actions and behaviors and indicated a belief that racism is not a systematic event. Rather she believed racism is a result of the actions of racially prejudiced people. This understanding did not denote an in-depth understanding of the systematic nature racism but rather it indicated a simplistic understanding that racism was a result of individual actors.



Yet, offering a bit of hope, Principal Alice was able to show some growth in her understandings of racism by the third and final interview. When asked if the public school system could be racist she replied, “You had asked me before, I said probably not, so yes, I do, yes”. When asked if other institutions could be racist she replied, “Yeah, companies, pretty much any institution”. However, when asked about systematic and institutional racism in schools she gave this example, “if they’d existed in school districts, it’s a central office issue that is allowed”. Thus, once again she relegated racism to a few people in a specific department in the central office and indicated a reluctance to say schools could be systematically racist. This did not ultimately denote an in-depth understanding of systematic racism but rather it indicated an understanding that racism is a result of individual actors. Therefore, Principal Alice was beginning to recognize the idea that systems and companies could be racist but she didn’t seem to understand it or see it well. Principal Alice was beginning to move in the right direction but there is still much room for growth.

Principal Beth had similar perceptions of racism. When asked what racism is she replied, “I think that for me racism is, it is about, it is about a class depiction and it is you know a stereotype. I think racism probably has that element of hate to it”. When asked to expound she replied, “they’re (racist) probably full of hate and they have no tolerance for anyone that’s different from them”. Principal Beth equated racism to socio-economic class depictions and the stereotypes of individuals. She stated further that racists are full of hate and lack tolerance for those not like them. These responses indicated she perceived racism to be an individual act and particularized to the behaviors of individual

prejudiced people. She clarified her views quite succinctly when asked if the public education system was racist.

I think it'll probably be more likely that of an individual. I mean, we have some of those same issues that we talked about here in this school, but I don't, I don't believe that as a whole we are racist.

Principal Beth again stated her belief that racism was a result of the actions of individual people. The concept that the entire school system was racist, even in the light of racially biased students outcomes, was too abstract for Principal Beth to recognize at that point in time. She reiterated this view when asked if any institution could be racist, "I suppose they could but I don't know if I can think of one. I guess depending upon the members of that institution or organization". When probed further about the possibility of the public school system or another institution being racist she responded, "I would hope that they are not, but I guess that it's possible ... I guess, think it could, depending upon the makeup of the individuals".

Thus, Principal Beth was unsure whether institutional racism is possible and implied that individual members of the institutions or systems would be the determining factor. She was uncertain whether a school system or even a business could be racist and hoped "they are not" but was clear she felt the "makeup" of the individuals and the members of the system or institution would be responsible. This did not denote an understanding of systematic and institutional racism but rather a belief that racism is comprised of individual acts of prejudice.

Principal Chad also had a similar and simple understanding of racism. When asked if racism was different than racial prejudice he replied, "I would say no". When

asked about racism he responded, “I guess prejudgments based on ethnicity”. Thus, Principal Chad believed racism and racial prejudice are akin to one another and based on the thoughts of individuals. When asked about racism in his hometown of Southern ISD he stated,

I would think that in this town that the amount of racism you would run into would be extremely low ... I would say that it is because for individuals that have grown up here their whole lives, they have been exposed to other races.

Principal Chad stated that due in part to his town’s diversity and the general exposure to other races that racism in his town is very low because “individuals that have grown up here their whole lives”. Thus, he once again indicated racism was individual in nature and did not seem to see the systematic nature of it.

Principal Dexter’s views on racism as individual acts were similar to the other White school leaders. Although, when initially asked about racism he stated, “racism is engrained”. However, when probing his perceptions of racism further Principal Dexter stated his beliefs this way.

Racism, to me it is not always how you treat other people, to me it’s also how you think and act about other people or talk about other people. I think that’s more racism now than it was in earlier times. I think racism used to be more outward, what you do. Now to me it’s more what you think and how you respond to that person.

This response elicited a belief that individuals, then and now, and how they think, act and respond comprise racism. There was not a systematic or institutional aspect to his understanding of racism. Principal Dexter further explained these beliefs when asked if institutions can be racist.

Well I think if you have an individual who is racist and they are part of that system and they have the power and the authority to make certain decisions within that system, then the system, a by-product of the system might include racist by-products of it.

Principal Dexter expounded on his beliefs when asked about the possibility of the public school system being racist.

I don't believe that the public school system is racist ... people are racist ... but I don't believe that it's the school being racist, I think it's the individual making the result in that way.

Principal Dexter was reluctant to say institutions and the public school system are racist.

Instead he believed individual viewpoints and individual decisions may produce racist by-products. Principal Dexter even stated, "I think it's the individual". This obviously indicated his belief that racism is individual in nature and not a systematic or institutional happening.

Principal Elle initially had some similar views of racism as the other White school leaders did. However, unlike the other White school leaders, she later indicated racism was systematic in nature. She initially displayed her beliefs of racism this way.

Anger, hate, just anger, hate. I'd picture angry mobs. I picture KKK type of things ... I think the overt racist acts just like, well I guess I'm going to be very stereotypical, they got their Confederate flag, they've got their guns and their truck and their Whiteness ... So that's my overt ... but, I mean I think a racist would never even think about marrying outside of their race, would not think of socializing, would not want their children to marry outside of their race, would not want grandbabies outside of their race. I'm fine with those Black people, but not in my family.

Principal Elle described racism in a "stereotypical" way with prejudiced individuals, angry mobs, Confederate flags, and guns. Further, she stated a racist would never

consider socializing, interacting or marrying outside of race. These are all overt actions perpetrated by individuals. However, when asked directly if systems and institutions can be racist she states,

Yes, oh god, yes! Well, I think obviously the education (system) is. There are so many instances of the public institutions and private that haven't hid their racism. Later when asked again if the public school system was racist she clearly stated, "Yes, I know it is. It hurts me to say it out loud". Thus, Principal Elle expressed knowledge of the systematic and institutional power and breadth of racism. She emphatically stated that the public school system was racist and alluded that many public and private institutions were also racist. She, unlike the other four principals, understands that individuals, bigots and racially prejudice people do not fully comprise and equate to racism in America. Rather, racism in America is endemic and systematic and Principal Elle recognized it.

*Summary.*

Most of the White school leaders in this study showed a lack of understanding about racism. They did not see racism as systematic or institutional in nature but instead felt it was a combination of behaviors and actions perpetrated by prejudiced individuals. When discussing racism Principal Alice stated, "I think racism is counting someone out because of their race". While Principal Beth said racism, "is about a class depiction and it is you know a stereotype" and Principal Dexter stated, "I think it's the individual making the result". Principal Chad when asked about racism succinctly replied, "I guess prejudgments based on ethnicity". Thus, none of the White school leaders had a profound understanding of racism as a systematic or institutional apparatus.

A limited view of racism, coupled with a lack of recognition of Whiteness, and the use of racial erasure, colorblindness and deficit thinking all present obstacles for the recognition of racial issues in a school. If White school leaders can't recognize racism in their school then it obviously will continue undisturbed. The White school leaders in this study experienced these obstacles and thus had difficulty addressing racial issues in their schools. Therefore, a discussion of the fifth theme, the White principals' reluctance to address racial issues, follows.

*Perceptions of Race and the Principalship*  
*Are the White School Leaders Addressing Racial Issues?*

Racial equity and social justice do not happen by chance. White school leaders must first recognize these racial issues to effectively address the systematic racial inequities within our public school system. However, without a critical view and a willingness from White school leaders to address these racial issues, many will remain undiscovered and undisturbed. Yet, the findings of this study, and the fifth theme, indicate that the White school leaders were reluctant to address racial issues. A deeper discussion follows.

*Issues of race are easier to avoid than address.*

Race and racial implications are a part of the public schools everyday. Effective White school leaders seek out and address racial issues on their campuses and do not ignore or shun them. The White principals in this study were asked about racial issues and incidents to help to determine their willingness to discuss race and racial issues. As stated, the findings of this study indicate a strong reluctance from most of the White

school leaders to address race and racial issues. In the following exchange Principal Alice described her reaction to a recent race-based interaction she had at a community event.

A member of a civic organization said to me, “Don’t you just hate Black people?” and I was like, ‘What are you talking about? And that was amazing to me and he didn’t repeat himself. And so I just acted like I didn’t hear him.

Principal Alice was presented with an obvious racial situation and was amazed but chose to not respond. She stated in her past that she rarely, if ever, discussed race and rarely discusses it now even at school with the other principals. When Principal Alice was asked how many times she had discussed race issues with other principals, she responded quickly, “Never, but I don’t control that” and “I think we’re afraid to talk about race. I think we’re afraid of offending each other”. She reiterated her genuine reluctance to address racial issues in this response.

I have had one White parent express to me that they are not used to everything here in the big city when their child is in a Black teacher’s classroom ... I said are you not used to the color? I said so you would prefer to have a White teacher? So I feel like it’s my job not to judge her for that and I’ve had that happened many, many times on the other end where they know there’s a Black teacher or two or three Black teachers in that grade level. They want their child in a Black teacher’s classroom and I feel like it’s my job to honor that.

Principal Alice went on to explain that on occasion she has simply changed White students to White teachers classrooms and several times she has moved Black students from White teachers classrooms to Black teachers classrooms. She simply believes her role to be one of appeasement of the parents. She never expressed a desire to address the race or equity issues or the teachers themselves and states, “it’s my job not to judge”. Principal Alice further explained her perceptions and thoughts when discussing a scenario involving a White parent.

Two years ago I actually had a White person come in and say, “we are not used to all the color”. What are you telling me? ‘I just want to tell you I don’t, cant have a Black teacher’ (giggling). Ok, well I kind of appreciated the honesty. Then you are not accusing the teacher of doing something so they can get a move, they are just telling me upfront, yeah, I can’t have a Black teacher. Which is racist, but that’s not my job, I can’t make the parents not racist.

When an obvious racial situation presented itself Principal Alice again stated that it was “not my job” to address those difficult racial issues. She again avoided the race issue and simply appeased the parents. Ignoring or avoiding racial issues is much easier than constantly addressing them. Although she “can’t make the parents not racist” she is capable of addressing racial issues more effectively. Further, she again demonstrated her unadulterated reluctance to address issues of race in another school settings in this exchange.

Well, you know, tomorrow I go for my allocations meeting, tomorrow. I’ll have the conversation, but, yeah, and no point in that conversation can I say, Scott my kids are Black, and her’s are White, at no point can I do that ... because it would be accusatory. It would be me accusing him.

Principal Alice was disinclined to confront and discuss racial issues. When asked about discussing an obvious racial disparity with her White supervisor in an educational setting and in a private meeting she stated, “at no point can I do that”. She simply refused to confront racial issues and situations and avoided the ones that presented themselves to her. She preferred to placate the status quo and her reluctance to properly address racial issues and situations was palpable.

Principal Beth was also reticent to discuss and address race and racial issues. She believed race and racism issues are rare and when presented are quite arduous to address.



Principal Beth expressed her reluctance to discuss race and racism in the following exchanges. When asked about how often she discussed race she replied, “probably never ... been in education 15 years, probably never” and “I think we skim over the race issue well”. Principal Beth stated she doesn’t believe race discussions “come up” and she has never had a specific talk about race in her multiple years as a public educator. Clearly, Principal Beth has very little experience discussing race and racial issues. When asked why it was so difficult to discuss race Principal Beth replied,

I think too pulling a lot of scabs off of some open wounds. We had last January we had an African-American presenter come in ... and there were some people that were very offended by what he said. Just different things, but they were highly offended and a lot of the White teachers were offended by things that he said.

Principal Beth relayed she and her White teachers were offended by the presentation on racial inequality. Her responses suggested that discussions around race, racial inequities or racism are daunting. Principal Beth expressed resistance to confront and address racial issues. However, somewhat unexpectedly, in the third and final interview Principal Beth views did start to move slightly. Her growth was on display when asked about how to facilitate more discussions about race. “That is a hard one, you know, I think that we just keep bringing it out into the light and we discuss it. I also think that it is important now”. So Principal Beth’s views on discussing race are slowly changing. She went on to further explain her thoughts about discussing race this way.

I think that it all starts with the data, and if you rely on the data, I think, you can’t go wrong. And it is having those conversations of asking why and what can we do or what are we doing, are they responding or are they not responding.

Principal Beth initially had a strong reluctance to and even explained why she felt it was hard, to discuss race. She went on to explain how teachers and fellow White educators were often offended when these discussions about race took place and her concern for them. Thus, she harbored her own internal resistance to these race discussions as well. However, by the end of the study Principal Beth was able to see the benefits of race-based discussions. She spoke of starting the race discussions with the data and “having those conversations”. It is with this newly found willingness to confront and discuss racial issues that racial equity and social justice can begin to flourish in her school. The institutional status quo should be expected to be maintained without a school leader who is capable of recognizing and able to address racial issues. Principal Beth has far to go before she is a social justice White school leader but she is moving in the right direction.

Principal Chad had a similar reluctance to address racial issues. When initially asked about race-based discussions he responded this way, “I don’t believe that the district or our campus singles anybody out ... because of race or anything like that”. Thus, his desire to discuss race was discounted right away. He goes on to explain his beliefs about discussing race in this exchange when asked about racial disparities in his student achievement data, “We look on it more per kid ... the kid individually, rather than looking at it from an ethnicity standpoint”. When asked if he would be willing to talk about how Black kids are doing and how race plays a part in the disparities he responded, “I don’t know about how race plays a part in their achievement or lack of achievement either way”. His responses did not elicit any confidence in his desire to tackle racial issues or address race in anyway. He simply didn’t want to see it. He

reiterated his views below when asked about discussing issues of race with his faculty and colleagues. “You know I haven’t had to”. When asked about discussing racial issues with fellow principals he said, “I don’t think really it is a race issue that we should be focusing on”. He actually stated that racial disparities and race aren’t what he and other principals “should be focusing on”. When asked if he ever discussed race or racial issues with anyone he retorted, “No.”

Principal Chad is a White school leader serving in a racially diverse school and in a racially diverse school district and he stated that he hasn’t had to discuss race at all, with anyone. Further, he clearly believed race isn’t worthy of discussion. He doesn’t want to see race, view racial situations nor discuss them. Principal Chad indicated a strong disinclination to addressing racial issues and, as mentioned earlier, wants to ignore race altogether. His reluctance to confront and address racial issues was conspicuous.

Initially, Principal Dexter showed some desire to discuss race and racial issues. He expressed this desire when asked about discussions he has had in the past about race.

I think my wife and I have conversations sometimes. My father-in-law is probably the most unracist person I’ve ever met, at least openly, like the conversations I have with him are probably better than the other conversations I have. I can be honest with him ... I had conversations with my administrative colleagues, other principals.

Thus, Principal Dexter has some experience discussing racial issues with his family and some professional colleagues. He mentioned he can “be honest” with his father-in-law but does not extend that comment to his educator colleagues. His conversations with fellow educators were explored further and he was asked if there was anyone else with whom he discussed race.

Well you know in this job that you don't have, you can't have a lot of friends in the business because it's hard to talk with teachers about other teachers. You are often wary about which administrators you can talk to about which administrators. So usually the principals that you feel like you touched, I mean, I talk with other principals all the time, elementary, high school that I'm close friends with and we have the same conversations about race or issues amongst our population and what we're dealing with.

Although Principal Dexter said he talked "with other principals all the time" he didn't exude a complete willingness to do so. He stated a general distrust of teachers and administrators and claimed he really only talks with principals that he "feel(s) like you touched" or a small subset of fellow principals that he was "close friends" with. This appeared more like a comfort zone than a place where they confront racial bias or discuss systematic racism. His wariness to discuss racial matters was further explored. When asked if he was willing to speak up about race he replied, "I think I'm cautious about who I'm talking to ... we've had our share of bad publicity in the district recently about some stuff and I don't want any of that to be compounded ... So you try to be cautious". He went on to explain his resistance to discuss race this way, "I'm cautious and probably talk less about it than I probably need to". He went on to explain the discussions about race mostly occurred when discussing data. When asked how often data and race are discussed Principal Dexter stated, "Data ... looking at what did you do and how the subgroups pair up ... I usually really probably look at it maybe one or two other times throughout the year". Principal Dexter stated he discusses race and racial issues with data but there was a strong disinclination and these discussions were rare. So, when asked further about these discussions of race and racial equity issues he responded correspondingly and succinctly, "I'm very cautious" and "why do we talk about it (race), why do we? I think by talking

about it (race) we make it more of a barrier”. Thus, Principal Dexter is undoubtedly reluctant and wary of discussions around race.

In contrast to the other White school leaders, Principal Elle was ready to discuss race and racial issues. She described how she introduced race to her faculty in this exchange.

We read “White privilege” by McIntosh one year in my classes and I just thought this is fabulous. We have to read this as staff development. It just made sense to me. So I brought it back to my school and luckily I do not have to get permission on what I do. We read the article with our staff, and did a whole hour to an hour and a half activity of McIntosh’s “White privilege, male privilege” article.

Principal Elle was ready to discuss race and her desire was evident in her introduction of *White Privilege* (McIntosh, 1989) to her staff. Most teachers and White school leaders have not been introduced to this seminal work. Thus, it was indicative of her willingness and aspiration to address racial equity and social justice. When asked more specifically about the role of the principal and addressing race Principal Elle explained her role this way.

Well first I have to acknowledge that it exists. I think that’s a very first thing and to not say I don’t see color and to not say I teach all the kids the same and it doesn’t matter if they don’t learn, that’s not my problem, that’s your problem type of thing. I think we have to first acknowledge that that is something that’s an issue.

Just like other successful White social justice leaders, Principal Elle simply states we first “have to acknowledge that it exists”. She appreciated the need to recognize race and racism before one can appropriately address it. Principal Elle definitely saw race, racial bias and racism and that gives her a distinct advantage in the fight against systematic racism in our public school system.

Finally, Principal Elle confirmed her willingness to discuss race, racial equity and racism with various educators and staff members. She adamantly felt “bringing light” to racial issues and addressing them was a necessary tactic in the battle for social justice and often used discussions around race with her staff. She recounted her eagerness to address racial issues this way when asked with whom she discusses race, “Oh my teachers ... all Black teachers, Hispanic teachers, my staff, my parents, my family, my secretary ... Oh yeah, I talk about it all the time. Oh, freaks them out at first, oh hell yes”. Clearly disposed to discuss race and racial issues, she went on to further clarify her readiness to discuss race and racial issues in this recollection of an interaction with her teachers and staff.

We sit down and every staff development...there is going to be at least one activity at some point that’s going to be centered around race, article, there’s going to be something. That’s a non-negotiable for me. So unlike the other four principals, Principal Elle was noticeably willing to discuss and address race and racial issues with her staff, her teachers, and her administrative team. This desire to illuminate race and racial issues within her school was strong evidence that the status quo was being challenged at her school. Discipline procedures and racial data were all examined for racial inequities and the roots of social justice were burgeoning at Principal Elle’s campus.

#### *Summary.*

Principal Alice had a strong reluctance to discussing race and racial issues with fellow educators and supervisors. Principal Alice seemed averse to confront and discuss racial issues and when talking about the possibility of addressing obvious racial issues

with her supervisor she stated, “at no point can I do that”. If she will not address racial issues in a private conversation with a fellow educator then she will most likely not discuss them much at all. Principal Beth has little experience discussing race and initially had a strong resistance to it. She expressed that teachers and fellow White educators were often offended when race discussions took place. As a result, she harbors her own internal reluctance to the discussions of race and racial issues. However, by the end of the study Principal Beth was able to see the benefits of race-based discussions and spoke of starting the race discussions with the data and “having those conversations”. Although her growth was slight and slow, it was encouraging. Principal Chad stated that throughout his career he hasn’t had to discuss race or racial issues at all. He clearly feels race isn’t worthy of discussion and doesn’t want to address any racial issues. Principal Chad firmly desires to avoid race and doesn’t wish to view racial situations nor discuss them. Principal Chad simply wished to disregard race altogether and that is not highly effective against the persistent power and extent of racism. Principal Dexter expressed caution and reluctance to fully discuss and address racial issues. He is certainly wary of discussions and actions around race and stated, “I’m very cautious” and he “probably talk(s) less about it than I probably need to”. He didn’t feel talking about race was effective and added, “I think by talking about it we make it more of a barrier”. Therefore, he did not sincerely desire to challenge and speak to these racial issues. There was more willingness to recognize the racial issues than to appropriately elucidate and confer them. Principal Dexter consistently expressed his caution in his beliefs and approach to racial situations and his reluctance to discuss these racial issues was palpable.

Principal Elle was keen to discuss race and racial issues with her staff, her teachers, and her administrative team. This yearning to illuminate race and racial topics with her staff was substantiation that racial inequities were being challenged at her school. Racial data, hiring, inter-racial interactions and White privilege were all open for discussion on her campus. Thus, the roots of social justice were burgeoning at Principal Elle's campus and the status quo was being challenged with the vigor necessary to affect it.

With the exception of Principal Elle, resistance to address racial issues was high. The lack of recognition of the racial issues, the caution of offending others, the pressures from "offended" White teachers and the general inclination to avoid these discussions led to a noticeable reluctance among Principals Alice, Beth, Chad and Dexter to address racial issues. This reluctance did not breed confidence in their abilities to or competence in effectively addressing race and racism in their schools.

Further, this reluctance to address racial issues, coupled with the White school leader's lack of recognition of Whiteness, lack of understanding about racism and use the deficit thinking, racial erasure and colorblindness all indicated an early and low level of White racial identity. This was unfortunate as advanced and higher levels of White racial identity are more indicative of an ability and willingness to address social justice and attack racial inequities. Thus, a more detailed discussion of White racial identity and the sixth and final theme of the findings of this study, a nascent level of White racial identity, follows.



### *White Racial Identity and White Identity Orientation*

#### *White with Room to Grow*

Without high levels of White racial identity and White identity orientation, White school leaders simply are not able to appropriately and effectively address racial issues and racial inequities in our public schools. The theory of White racial identity development is resolutely and firmly established in the literature (Carter, 1990, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2005; Helms & Carter, 1990; Tatum, 1992). White racial identity has two phases with three stages within each phase (see Helms, 1990, 1992). Phase one, the abandonment of racism, includes the contact, disintegration, and reintegration stages. Phase two, the defining a non-racist White identity, consists of the pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy stages. White identity orientation (Howard 1993, 1999) offers an analogous, yet alternate, view of racial identity for Whites. Howard's work, akin to Helm's White racial identity, provides a separate framework to examine where White school leaders are in terms of their White racial identity. Similar to Helms, Howard's (1999) model identifies three distinct, semi-linear, orientations of White identity: fundamentalist, integrationist and transformationist.

The initial White identity orientation, fundamentalist, is distinguished by a denial of Whiteness and a general ignorance of race. White fundamentalists are literal and linear thinkers and they deny differences in races (Howard, 1999). Correspondingly, the initial stage of White racial identity, contact, is characterized by attitudes of oblivion to the implications of race, the lack of a perceived uniqueness in their racial classification, and due to their racial unconsciousness, a lack of recognition or acknowledgment of the

differences in the experiences of Whites and people of color (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997).

The results of this study found that four of the White school leaders are still in the process of recognizing their White race and Whiteness and thus hold a nascent level of White racial identity. When discussing her own race and Whiteness Principal Alice stated her beliefs this way, “I don’t know that I get a privilege”. When asked about the privileges and advantages of her White race Principal Beth stated, “I don’t think that it made a difference” and “I believe that it doesn’t matter”. Principal Chad retorted to the same inquiry this way, “I wouldn’t say that there is any advantage” and “I wouldn’t say that there’s any advantage to any particular ethnicity”. Principal Dexter replied, “I don’t think it [race] makes a difference”, “I don’t think it’s an advantage” and even stated, “I think ... sometimes other races feel that White people have an advantage”. Principal Dexter claimed that other races might feel that Whites get an advantage but he did not perceive it to be real and insinuated that there was no advantage to being White in America. In contrast, Principal Elle stated, “Race matters ... it is definitely the factor. It’s just a factor period”.

Thus, these White school leaders did not “become aware” of White privilege and there was an overt “denial of Whiteness”. The White school leaders in this study did not show a profound knowledge of the differences, advantages, disadvantages or the uniqueness of their White race. Instead the White school leaders demonstrated an “oblivious” stance to Whiteness. Besides Principal Elle and Principal Beth’s brief simplistic statements around White privilege at the end of the study, the White school

leaders simply did not grasp or comprehend the advantages and privileges of their White race nor Whiteness with any certainty or expertise.

The subsequent White identity orientation, integrationist, is distinguished by an acceptance of racial differences and the initiation of the interrogation of Whiteness. Likewise, in stage two of White racial identity, disintegration, Whites begin to become aware of White privilege and racism and attempt to begin to make sense of the, sometimes harsh, realities of racial diversity (Helms, 1990, 1992). Without the recognition of the privileges and advantages of the White race there is little hope of identifying and interrogating Whiteness. Thus, the White school leaders in this study were situated in the contact stage and fundamentalist orientation of White identity development. These White school leaders did not “rise” to the integrationist orientation of White identity or the second stage of White racial identity, disintegration. Although there were signs these White school leaders were slowly trending towards the second stage and the next orientation, they demonstrated that they were still in the first stage and in the initial orientation of White racial identity development.

*Summary.*

The majority of the participants in this study exhibited beliefs and perceptions that placed them in the initial White identity orientation and the first stage of White racial identity, contact. The “general ignorance” to the uniqueness of their White race, their oblivious understanding of the implications of race and their lack of recognition of Whiteness all indicated these White school leaders were early in their White racial identity development. This was regrettable because higher levels of White racial identity

and White identity orientation have been shown to positively affect one's beliefs and attitudes of race and racism (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms & Juby, 2004; Helms, 1990, 2005; Howard, 1990, 1999; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997).

Principal Elle was able to recognize the privileges and advantages of her White race, acknowledged Whiteness and she was "committed to social action" on her campus. Thus, she demonstrated a transformationist White identity orientation and was approaching the final stage of White racial identity, autonomy. Her high level of White racial identity and White identity orientation allowed her to better understand the racial issues on her campus and as a result she was actively in the pursuit of social justice for all students on her campus.

However, the findings of this study indicated that the other White school leaders were reluctant to address racial issues, limited in their ability to understand race and racism, challenged to recognize Whiteness and early in their journey to an advanced White racial identity. Thus, there is much work to be done if these White school leaders are to successfully and equitably educate all students. A concise summary of the findings of this study subsequently follows and concludes chapter four.

### **Summation of Findings**

Chapter four began with a description of the participants of the study followed by the presentation of the results and findings. The results and findings of this study were organized around the three research questions: 1.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals' have about race? 2.) What are the perceptions that selected White

principals' about racism? 3.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals' have about the role of race and the principalship? The findings from this study elicited 6 themes: 1.) The White principals utilized deficit thinking, 2.) The White principals employed racial erasure and colorblindness, 3.) The White principals did not recognize Whiteness, 4.) The White principals did not understand systematic and institutional racism, 5.) The White principals were reluctant to address racial issues, and 6.) The White principals demonstrated a nascent level of White racial identity.

### *Summary*

Most of the White school leaders in this study utilized deficit thinking when discussing people and students of color. This study found deficit thinking to be prevailing and steady throughout. The “culture of poverty” and the belief that poor performance by students of color is a result of deficiencies within the student or family and not in the educational structure were the most prevalent deficit thinking “trap”. Furthermore, the lack of social skills, the chronic lack of educational concern and educational prowess, and the general negative inclinations for the families, neighborhoods and communities where people and students of color live were also apparent. The perceptions and beliefs of these White school leaders indicated the belief that people and students of color were underprepared and less educated and in a sense, “less human”. Thus, the people and students of color in these schools must constantly and consistently work to overcome these hidden perceptions of their White school leaders.

Next, the White school leaders employed racial erasure and colorblindness in their discussions and understandings of race. Principals Beth, Chad and Dexter showed a

desire to erase and disregard race and indicated it had little significance. When asked about race one principal stated, “I don’t think of it at all” and another said, “the kids that are most successful ... are the ones that are blind to color”. For these White school leaders, race was simply a skin color or a biological marker with little significance. They saw little importance to race and instead desired to ignore and expunge it. For Principal Alice, race was more ambiguous. Although she was able to see race, she indicated a yearning to subdue, mute, or avoid it whenever possible. Thus, the White school leaders in this study preferred to erase, shun and simply ignore race and their White race. This was unfortunate because the recognition of race is a pertinent first step in the fight against the racial inequities and the status quo.

Further, the recognition of the advantages and privileges of their White race and Whiteness were elusive. Four of the White school leaders felt race had only negligible to no influence or effect on one’s life. Principal Alice wondered why people think of her as a privileged White person and Principal Chad stated, “I wouldn’t say that there’s any advantage to any particular ethnicity”. Principal Dexter, when asked about the advantages of being White, supported the negligible affects of race by stating, “I don’t think it makes a difference”. Thus, Whiteness and the advantages and privileges conferred to all White’s remained obscure to these White school leaders. Without the recognition of Whiteness, racism and its systematic affects are more difficult to distinguish.

Thus, the White school leaders had difficulty understanding the systematic, structural, and institutional nature of racism. Like many White people in America, the White school leaders in this study demonstrated a belief and understanding that racism

was individual in nature. Racially prejudiced people employing stereotypes, “counting people out” and “making judgments” based on race were posited as racism. However, racially prejudiced people and bigots acting in overt and racially prejudice ways, although reprehensible, cannot and do not encompass the grand scale and breadth of racism in America. The White school leader’s lack of understanding around the systematic and institutional nature of racism limits their abilities to recognize and properly address racial issues on their campuses. Without the ability and skill to recognize racism in all of its manifestations in the public education arena, these White school leaders will not be able to effectively address racial inequities.

Therefore, predictably, four of the White school leaders were reluctant to address racial issues. Due in part to their lack of an insightful understanding about race, their White race, Whiteness and racism, these White school leaders demonstrated little desire to address racial issues. There was a noticeable general discomfort when racial issues were presented and they neither attacked nor addressed these racial issues with vigor or resolution. Instead the White school leaders in this study were reluctant to address issues of race.

Finally, most of the White school leaders demonstrated a nascent, or low level, of White racial identity and White identity orientation development. The White school leaders did not identify the advantages or privileges of their White race nor recognize Whiteness. Instead, they demonstrated a lack of understanding or “general ignorance” to the uniqueness of their White race. Furthermore, they were not able to see racism in a systematic manner and were not actively attacking racial issues on their campuses or in

their district. Thus, their level of White racial identity and White identity orientation was low. It is with a more advanced White racial identity and higher level of White identity orientation that White school leaders can effectively recognize Whiteness and begin to work against systematic racism and for social justice. However, these White school leaders have much room to grow before they are in a position to successfully address racial issues and racial inequities in their public school.

The meaning of these findings, how they relate to past research, how they influence future White school leaders, White principals and White educators, and how they affect future research are discussed in chapter five.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations for the Future**

#### *Introduction*

Research has shown that students of color (SOC) are performing at lower levels on standardized tests (College Board, 1999, 2009; Loveless, 2012; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003, 2010; Noguera, 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Perie, Grigg & Dion, 2005a, 2005b), are over-represented in special education and remedial classes (Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994; Skiba et al., 2008), are under-represented in gifted and talented programs and college track classes (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Ford, 2006; Ogbu, 1994; Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Desher, 1994). Further, SOC are educated in schools with fewer resources (Kozol, 1991; Lee, 2004), are more likely to be expelled or suspended (Gordon, Paina & Kelcher, 2000), are more likely to drop-out (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009), are scoring lower on college entrance exam scores (College Board, 2009; Maruyama, 2003), are seeking entrance into colleges and universities less frequently, enrolling less and earning fewer degrees (Lui, 2011; Maruyama, 2003). Compounding issues, SOC are often taught by teachers that hold negative perceptions about them (Carr, 1997; Cross, 2003; Garza & Garza, 2010; Lewis, Pitts, & Collins, 2002; McKenzie, 2001; Oates, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Weissglass, 2003) and research has shown that teacher perceptions of students of color and race can negatively affect students' achievement (Brophy & Good, 1970; Pringle, Lyons & Booker, 2010; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tompkins & Boor, 1980). Thus, the public education

system has many racially biased educational gaps it must address if it is to provide equity to all students.

This study expanded the research on educator perceptions of race and racism by examining the perceptions of principals. Since over 81% of the principals in public schools in the United States are White (NCES, 2013), this study focused on the perceptions of White principals. There is a positive relationship between administrative leadership and students' achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Riehl, 2000; Scheurich, 2002b) and the level and quality of leadership we have will help determine, for better or worse, the kinds of schools we have (Sergiovanni, 1992). Public school principals and White principals leaders in the United States need to be prepared for a more diverse student population, and be prepared to offer every child an equitable educational opportunity.

Perceptions and prejudice, even racial prejudice, are natural and common in humans (Allport, 1954; Appiah, 1990; D'Souza, 1996; Samelson, 1978; Tatum, 1993) and perceptions, beliefs, and experiences affect a principal's decision-making (Hickman, 2004; Scott & Teddlie, 1987). Thus, White principals perceptions of race and racism are quite significant in the examination of the equitable education of all students. A better understanding of the perceptions White school leaders hold about race and racism will help inform principal preparation programs and provide valuable insights for educational practitioners in the field.

For this study, 5 White principals were chosen by purposive method sampling (Patton, 1990). All of the White principals were selected from a large racially diverse

school district in the southern United States. For this study, the racially diverse district was one with more than 25,000 students and it had a White student population of less than 40%.

Individual interviews are traditional sources of data collection in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 1998) and were utilized in this study. Each participant completed three one-hour interview sessions. Interview protocols with both closed-ended and open-ended questions were employed for this research study. Three research questions were utilized to guide the study.

- 1.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race?
- 2.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about racism?
- 3.) What are the perceptions that selected White principals have about race and the principalship?

In addition, this study utilized critical theory and Critical White Studies (CWS) as the general theoretical framework to design the study and analyze the data collected. The goal of critical theory is to recognize unconscious belief systems that individuals hold and critical theorists work for social justice by constantly questioning and challenging cultural and societal values and practices (Crotty, 1998). Critical White Studies work to analytically examine Whiteness as it applies to notions of systematic racism, White privilege, and White racial identity. Thus, this study critically examined the perceptions and the unconscious beliefs system of these selected White principals and sought to query and challenge their beliefs about race and racism. Finally, this study illuminated the perceptions these selected White school leaders held about race and

racism in order to provide knowledge and insight in the struggle to find solutions to the systematic inequities of the public school system and the persistent educational gaps.

### *Summary of Findings*

Guided by the three research questions posed in this study and utilizing critical theory, the data were critically analyzed to examine and identify the perceptions these five White school leaders held about race and racism. This critical examination revealed six themes:

- 1.) The White principals utilized deficit thinking.
- 2.) The White principals employed racial erasure and colorblindness.
- 3.) The White principals did not recognize Whiteness.
- 4.) The White principals did not understand systematic and institutional racism.
- 5.) The White principals were reluctant to address racial issues.
- 6.) The White principals demonstrated a nascent level of White racial identity.

A concise summary of the findings and the six themes from the analysis of the perceptions of these White school leaders follows.

### *Perceptions of Race*

#### *Deficit thinking.*

The findings in this study established deficit thinking to be prevailing and steady throughout. The belief that the poor performance by students of color was a result of deficiencies within the student themselves or within their families and not in the educational structure or school, was the most prevalent deficit thinking “trap”. “The culture of poverty” or the wrath of poverty was a consistent belief put forth by these

White school leaders. They proposed that the students of color performed poorly in school due to the deficient family structure and negative cultural and communal influences. In addition, the student's lack of social skills, the parent's chronic lack of educational concern and educational prowess, and the general pessimistic inclinations for the families, neighborhoods and communities where people and students of color live were also apparent. The perceptions and beliefs of these White school leaders indicated people and students of color were less competent, under-educated and generally capable.

*Racial erasure and colorblindness.*

The White school leaders employed racial erasure and colorblindness in their discussions and understandings of race. For these participants race was simply a skin color or a biological marker with little significance. One principal stated, "I don't think of it at all" and another said, "I really don't even think of myself as being White, I mean that's my skin color but I don't know ... for me it's just a matter of skin color". The White school leaders saw little importance to race and instead desired to disregard and erase it when able. For Principal Alice, race was more imprecise. Although she was able to recognize race, she indicated a desire to subdue, mute, or avoid it. Thus, although race matters and carries real meaning, the participants in this study preferred to shun, subdue or simply ignore race and their White race.

*Whiteness whiteout!*

The White school leaders in this study indicated a limited knowledge of the affects of race and Whiteness. The participants said race had a negligible or no influence on one's life and demonstrated little knowledge of the advantages and privileges their White race conferred upon them. Principal Alice wondered why people thought of her as

a privileged White person at all and Principal Chad stated, “I wouldn't say that there's any advantage to any particular ethnicity”. When asked about the advantages of being White, Principal Dexter supported the negligible affects of race by stating, “I don't think it makes a difference”. The White principals in this study did not insinuate a profound understanding of race or its affects and had difficulty recognizing any privileges or advantages of their White race. Thus, the existence of Whiteness remained elusive to these White principals.

### *Perceptions of Racism*

#### *Not systematic at all.*

Principal Alice, Beth, Chad and Dexter's level of knowledge and recognition of racism in all its forms was limited. These White school leaders expressed the belief that racism was a result of individual thoughts, actions and behaviors and did not indicate a belief that racism was systematic or institutional in nature. Racially prejudiced individuals “counting people out”, making “prejudgments based on ethnicity”, “employing stereotypes”, and “making judgments” based on race were all posited as racism. They did not view the systematic and institutional nature of racism and did not consider systematic racism was viable. Principal Elle was able to recognize systematic racism and showed an advanced understanding of institutional and systematic racism.

### *Role of Race and the Principalship*

#### *Little yearning to address racial issues.*

The participants in this study were reluctant to address racial issues. Due in part to their lack of an insightful understanding around race, their White race, Whiteness and racism, these White principals demonstrated little desire to address racial issues. When

asked about discussing and addressing racial issues the White school leaders stated, “I haven’t had to”, “I am very cautious”, and even “at no point can I do that”. One White school leader even stated, “I think by talking about it (race) we make it more of a barrier”. Thus, there was a noticeable general discomfort when racial issues were presented and the White school leaders did not attack nor address these racial issues with vigor or resolution. Instead, the White principals in this study were reluctant to address racial issues.

*Nascent levels of White racial identity and White identity orientation.*

Finally, the participants in this study demonstrated a nascent and low level of White racial identity and White identity orientation development. The White principals did not identify the advantages or privileges of their White race nor recognize Whiteness. Moreover, they were not able to see racism in a systematic manner and were not actively addressing racial issues on their campuses or in their district. It is with a more advanced White racial identity and higher level of White identity orientation that White school leaders can effectively work against systematic racism and for social justice. However, the White school leaders in this study were early in their White racial identity development and have much room to grow before they are in a position to successfully address racial issues and racial inequities in their public school.

*Implications and Discussion of Findings*

Having worked in the Texas public school system as a teacher, principal and superintendent, I realize and appreciate the day-to-day challenges White school leaders, indeed all educators, face when trying to educate their students. Part of the impetus for this study was to discover conscious and subconscious perceptions that White principals

held about race and racism and share that data with educators and White school leaders alike. This research will also help me in my future career as a White school leader.

In the subsequent section, the implications of the findings and their relationships to previous research are discussed. Recommendations to practitioners and White principals are also offered. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented and a concise summary concludes the chapter.

### *Relationship to Previous Research*

The findings of this study coincide with and support much previous research on race, racism, and Whiteness. (See, for example, Feagin & Vera, 1995; Ryan, 2003; Young, 2011; Young & Liabe, 2000). These participants in this study indicated a lack of complex knowledge and understanding of race and racism and had difficulty recognizing Whiteness. Without a complex understanding of race, racism, and Whiteness, predictably, these White principals showed little interest in engaging racial issues. Plausibly, these White school leaders also demonstrated an early and low level of White racial identity.

This lack of recognition and understanding about race by Whites has been previously noted in the research and was supported by the findings of this study. A discussion of this study's findings and previous research follows.

### *Deficit thinking.*

Deficit thinking is a distorted reality where people of color, including students, are perceived as limited in a variety of ways and deficient. Within the educational arena, the deficit thinking model views families and students of color as less competent, less



skilled, less knowing, and in short, less human (Ryan, 1971). Regrettably, the White school leaders in this study readily applied deficit thinking throughout the interviews. However, this is congruent with much previous research and literature. (See, for example, Ryan, 1971, Valencia, R. & Solórzano, D., 1997)

The deficit thinking model is deeply embedded in educational thought and practice, pervading schools that serve children of color (Valencia, R. & Solórzano, D., 1997) and is self-perpetuated among both school leaders and educational constituents (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Further, Skrla and Schuerich (2004) observe, “deficit thinking has remained the dominant, unchallenged paradigm that school district leaders have used to explain to others or make sense to themselves of the persistent, pervasive and disproportionate underachievement in school of children of color (p.238). These deficit thoughts, conscious or sub-conscious, essentially place students of color and their families at a different starting point, well back from the starting line, than White students. Deficit thoughts place limiting factors upon students of color before they even start into our racist public education system. Without surprise, it follows that students of color are finding it problematic to successfully navigate the public education system.

Principal Chad demonstrated his deficit thinking quite well as he discusses why the Black and White mathematical “achievement gap” still exists. He explained the gap this way, “Probably economics, education, educational opportunity at home, away from school” and he asked, “Is there a mom or dad there when they go home at night? Are they working a second or third job? What is the level of importance of education in those households?” All of these questions indicated his belief that students and families of

color are less capable of success. Even when presented with racially biased student data he wanted to place the blame on socio-economics, the parents, and the student's home. Principal Dexter displayed his deficit beliefs when talking about student achievement and racial equity. He stated, "African-Americans are extremely behind the curve ... look at those kids ... at least 20 are single parent homes. These 10 are being raised by grandparents who are in their 80's".

Principal Beth demonstrated her deficit views quite readily in this exchange discussing the factors be for the disproportionate District Alternative Educational Program placements for Black males in her district. "Our kids are being raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends and so I think that there has been a lack of social skill instruction which is carried over to the school." Principal Beth and Dexter both indicated their beliefs that the Black students and families in Southern ISD were chronically single parented, grand-parented and poorly parented. However, this practice of bringing together extended familial and communal networks of Black women and Black relatives to help rear Black children and to share responsibilities for child rearing has been termed "other mothering". Collins (2000) explains, "other mothering", a practice with West African roots, provide assistance to biological mothers and, if necessary, may even step in when biological mothers are unable to care for their children. Amidst the strain placed on Black family structures in the United States by oppressive living conditions, from slavery to urban poverty to the criminal justice system, "other mothering" is both a practical adaptation to the exigencies of Black life in America and an expression of Black women's moral and political commitment to the Black children

and the Black community. “Other mothering” is not perceived as negative. Rather, for the Black community and for Black women and Black children, “other mothering” has translated into a deep, motherly investment in Black students’ well-being and success and not the pessimistic, deficit based beliefs the participants displayed. “Other mothering” reflects the Black communities’ commitment and loyalty and translates into their devotion to ensuring Black students’ success (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, Dixon & Dingus, 2008).

However, for the participants in this study, there was a belief that Black students in their school and district were poorly and inadequately parented. The Black students lacked social skills and were unable to perform properly at school and as a result were often punished for the lack of these skills. They never mentioned the White single parent homes, of which there are many, but Black families were disproportionately perceived to be led by deficient single parents, friends, uncles, aunts and even aged grandparents.

From his study of successful social justice school leaders, Theoharis (2004) states, “these principals connected with their financially struggling population ... and demonstrated that successfully engaging low-income families was about having sensitivity to their situations and a respect for their dignity” (p. 304). However, the White school leaders in this study showed no connection to their families of color and did not discuss them with dignity or sensitivity. Rather, their deficit thinking applied negative markers upon the families of color and indicated a less dignified opinion of their living arrangements, parenting skills, educational prowess and their perceived importance of

education. Thus, it is through this limiting and pessimistic lens that many students, parents and families of color must persevere.

This pattern of deficit thinking “traps” these White school leaders thoughts in a less than equitable way. “Equity traps” are non-equitable patterns of thinking and behavior about race and people of color that “trap” the possibilities for creating an equitable education for all and they lead to “dysconsciousness.” Dysconsciousness, “is the uncritical habit of the mind, including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions and beliefs, that justifies inequities” (King, 1997; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 135). This dysconsciousness deters White school leaders from recognizing and believing in the possibility that all students are capable and deserving of an equitable education and can prevent White school leaders from believing their students of color can be successful learners. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) conceptualized four equity traps: deficit view, racial erasure and color-blindness, avoidance and employment of the gaze, and paralogic beliefs and behaviors. Although, four traps were conceived from their study only the first two traps, deficit thinking and colorblindness, and racial erasure, were the prominently found in this study.

Deficit thinking is a debilitating and highly limiting “equity trap” that White school leaders must acknowledge and avoid. If White school leaders continue to believe people and students of color are inferior, then they should expect the students to continue to perform as they have previously in our racially biased public education system with less achievement and less success. White school leaders must begin to consciously

perceive all students as equally capable and not allow the debilitating pattern of deficit thinking to arise.

Another limiting and incapacitating pattern of thinking, “or equity trap”, found on display in this study with these White school leaders was racial erasure and colorblindness. This “equity trap” is discussed below.

*Colorblindness and racial erasure.*

Colorblindness and racial erasure are limiting equity traps that allow White school leaders to trivialize color and avoid the negative connotations of race and racism altogether. Denying race and its affect are regrettable because many qualitative studies have provided evidence illustrating the dangers of acting as if race and color don’t matter (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2001; Ditomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003; Feagin, 2001; Lewis, 2004; Milner, 2012b; Tijerina-Revilla, Stuart-Wells, & Jellison-Holme, 2004; Ward-Schofield, 1997). These studies assert that ignoring race and color not only legitimates the erasure of the culture and histories of people of color, but it also keeps Whiteness invisible and “ignoring color and race, especially when understood to be virtuous, can lead (White) people to presume that if overt manifestations of racism are absent, if everyone just seems “to get along,” then racism has been eliminated” (Applebaum, 2006, p. 34). Many Whites do not see themselves in racialized terms (Averling, 2003; Bergerson, 2003; Kluegal & Smith, 1986; Marx, 2003, Marx & Pennington, 2003; Ogbu, 1978), so racial erasure and colorblindness are convenient methods for White educators. In a sense, if there is no color and no race then Whites can’t possibly be racist and are able to avoid any guilt or negative feelings associated

with their race and racism. As a result, for Whites, a discourse of racial erasure and colorblindness has become normative and people have become incoherent in talking about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

Regrettably, the participants and the findings of this study indicated the use of racial erasure and colorblindness. Thus, unfortunately, this equity trap is alive and well in Southern ISD. When asked, these White principals consistently ignored and “erased” race and their White race. Principal Beth showed her desire to not think of race and ignore it if possible in this response, “I really don’t even think of myself as being White, I mean that’s my skin color but I don’t know.” When asked in the following exchange about race Principal Chad showed his desire to erase his White race this way, “I guess all it really means is both my parents were White, that’s what I came out.” When asked if he ever thought about being White he simply stated, “not really, no” and “No, I really don’t.” Similarly, Principal Dexter demonstrated his yearning to disengage color and race from the discussions in the following exchange, “I know that it would only matter if you need it to matter. I’m a predominantly African-American school but the kids that are most successful to me are the ones that are blind to color.” In this exchange Principal Dexter actually advocated colorblindness and supported the negligible affects of race on his students of color. This not only indicated a longing to remove race and color from the discussion but also insinuated that “successful” Black students in his school are the Black students more “open” to being colorblind or the ones who leave their Black race at the door. This, of course, is not possible and thus limits the opportunity and chance of equity for his students of color. Black students, like White students, always carry their color and

their race. No one can release themselves from the racial markers they carry and these markers carry significant and real consequences.

Racial markers have disadvantages, privileges, and power associated with them that should not be ignored because race and color do matter in the “pecking order” of our society (Dalton, 1995; West, 1995). Erasing race and refusing to see color may be effortless for many Whites and these White school leaders but it does come with a cost (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2001; Ditomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Tijerina-Revilla, Stuart-Wells, & Jellison-Holme, 2004; Ward-Schofield, 1997), as race and color do matter in the “pecking order” of our society (Dalton, 1995; West, 1995). Harper and Patton (2007) state, “instead of tackling the realities of race, it is much easier to ignore them by embracing colorblind ideologies . . . it creates a lens through which the existence of race can be denied and the privileges of Whiteness can be maintained” (p. 3).

The White school leaders in this study consistently utilized the equity trap of colorblindness and racial erasure. Thus, they were denying the advantages and privileges of their White race while subjugating the disadvantages of their student and parents of color. This limiting pattern of thoughts allowed the White school leaders to avoid issues of race and allowed them to go unattended and unaddressed. In our fight to attain equitable education for all students in our public education system today we cannot endure racial erasure and colorblindness. Conversely, White school leaders must recognize race and must see Black and White teachers and Black and White students, respectively. White school leaders cannot just view generic faculty and nonspecific students. Racial markers have disadvantages, privileges, and power and they should not

be ignored or denied.

White school leaders cannot afford to embrace colorblindness in their practices with students of color because White school leaders and their students' identities, experiences and behaviors are intricately shaped by race (Ladson-Billings, 2009, 1994; Milner, 2010, 2012b), thus, making the recognition of race and color highly important. White school leaders simply cannot ignore race any longer if they are to become more effective as social justice educators and leaders. Social justice requires White school leaders to "make issues of race ... central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). This is not possible if race and color are trivialized and ignored. Erasing race is not an option in today's educational world. Race matters and White school leaders must recognize and address it if they are to finally work towards social justice.

The recognition of the advantages and privileges of one's White race has also been espoused as an important step in the development of social justice leaders (see Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). However, the White school leaders in this study did not fully recognize the advantages and privileges of their White race and, thus, Whiteness remained elusive to them. A discussion of the denial of Whiteness and previous research directly follows.

*They can't see Whiteness?*

The tacit acceptance of Whiteness and White privilege becomes a dysconscious means of ignoring the intricacies of race embedded in America's systems and behaviors (King, 1991; Lopez, 2003). Dysconscious racism refers to the lack of critical



consciousness and thought regarding race and the “uncritical habit” of the mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things (King, 1991, 1997). These White school leaders lacked a critical consciousness around Whiteness and simply accepted their White race has no meaning and no affect on their lives. This lack of understanding and recognition of race and Whiteness and the implied acceptance of Whiteness by these White school leaders is profound and it affects their perceptions, beliefs and decisions.

The White school leaders in this study demonstrated a lack of insight and acumen around race and their White race. When asked if there were advantages to being White in America the White school leaders were reticent to respond and when they did respond they asserted that being White had little to no affect on their lives. Some of the White school leaders even felt being White could be a slight disadvantage. When asked about her White race Principal Beth stated, “I think that that I’ve had blinders on.” When asked whether his White race was advantageous Principal Chad stated,

No, I don’t believe so ... I wouldn’t say that there is any advantage to any ethnicity ... I’m trying to come up with a specific example ... what might be an advantage? I’m not coming up with one right now.

It is easier to not notice race than it is to recognize the benefits of being White. Other principals inferred being White could actually be a negative. Principal Alice stated,

People assumed certain things to be true about you until you prove that they’re not true about you because you’re White. Some Black people assume certain things to be true about you because you are White that aren’t necessarily positive.

Still another White school leader indicated he had similar perceptions of race and his Whiteness. When asked if his White race made a difference or was an advantage to him Principal Dexter stated,

I don't think it makes a difference ... but, I don't know if that has anything to do with being White ... because I would assume that there would be a Caucasian student who has a predominantly African-American teaching staff or an African-American administrative staff who feel like the African-American kids gets special treatment or vice versa.

Principal Dexter's lack of understanding around race and what it means to be White in America and the lack of recognition of the privileges and advantages conferred to Whites are a condition of Whiteness. Whiteness is "a broad, collective American silence. The denial of White as a racial identity ... allows quiet, the blankness, to stand as the norm" (Hale, 1997, p. x).

As previously stated in the research, Whiteness is indiscernible for most Whites. Whiteness, "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10), can be viewed as a package of unearned assets, which can be counted on by Whites but are meant to remain oblivious (McIntosh, 1989). The principals were unaware of the benefits they are conferred as Whites and unsure it held any benefit for them. They were unmindful of any privilege or advantages they may have received as a result of their White race.

However, this corresponds with previous research as most White Americans don't think about their Whiteness at all or else think of it as neutral or positive category (Vera, Feagin, & Batur, 2001). "Even thinking about Whiteness takes a deliberate conscious

effort that most White Americans simply never attempt” (Marx & Pennington, 2003, p. 32). Just as previous research clearly states, these White school leaders had difficulty recognizing Whiteness and it remained oblivious.

The White school leaders in this study did not acknowledge benefits nor recognize the role their White race has played in their lives even as a White public school leader. Thus, due to their social positioning and the advantages conferred, these Whites school leaders have the power to neutralize and even ignore the impact of race when it benefits them. These benefits, advantages and privileges afforded to Whites allow them to be less cognizant of race and Whiteness. However, this lack of recognition and knowledge of race and Whiteness does not allow these White principals the ability to properly address racial issues in their schools. Further, these levels of recognition and knowledge of race coincides with a narrow view of racism and a limited White racial identity and White identity orientation. A discussion of racism, the findings of this study and previous research subsequently follows.

### *Racism*

#### *Systematic and institutional?*

The results of this study found White school leaders had a narrow view and understanding of racism. The White school leaders were reticent to acknowledge systematic racism and minimized the power of racism by positioning it on individuals and relegating it to individual stereotypes, prejudgments and overt acts. The White school leaders considered racism to be a collection of individual racially prejudiced acts and did not recognize the systematic and institutional nature of racism in America. This is a

convenient definition and belief of racism for Whites as it relegates racism to individual acts of prejudice and allows Whites an easy escape to being non-racist. If Whites believe they aren't racially prejudiced, then in their minds they can't be racist. Unfortunately, these White school leader's views of racism corresponds well with much of the literature on racism.

Many Whites find themselves believing individual, overt acts of racial prejudice and bigotry equate to racism (Ikuenobe, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Schuerich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000). When asked about racism Principal Alice demonstrated this belief, "I think racism, I think are stereotypes and people buying into complete stereotypes and judging that entire race based upon stereotypes that or even trends that may exist." Principal Dexter stated about racism, "I think it's the individual" and "what you think and how you respond." Principal Beth declared, "prejudgments based on ethnicity" equated to racism. Thus, the White school leaders felt racism was a collection of individual beliefs and acts of prejudice and did not view it as systematic in nature.

These understandings of racism are regrettably congruous to previous research. In the United States racially prejudiced acts are typically what is understood, especially by Whites, to be racism (Ikuenobe, 2010; Lopez, 2003; Schuerich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000). Young and Laible (2000) found that school administrators tend not to recognize racism and do not understand the way it works. Ryan (2003) found that principals were reluctant to acknowledge racism and those who did tended to emphasize its insignificant nature. Further, the grand scale of systematic and

institutional racism helps to camouflage its affects from many and unlike the more easily recognized overt individual racially prejudice acts, institutional racism is subtle (Keleher & Johnson, 2001), quietly omnipresent (Lawrence, 1993), operates unquestioned through normative procedures (Lucal, 1996) and remains “invisible” to Whites (Pence & Fields, 1999). It is the systemic nature of racism within the social fabric of the United States and within educational institutions and organizations that makes it elusive to the majority (Lund, 2010). Thus, the elusiveness and subtleness of institutional and systematic racism was evident with the White school leaders in this study. These White principals were unable to see the systematic nature of racism and thus it is able to continue to exist, unquestioned and undisturbed. Racial bias and the procedures and policies that foster it will remain active in these public schools until the systematic nature of racism is reveal to these White school leaders. Until systematic racism is recognized and addressed, the White hegemonic status quo will continue to “quietly” operate, hidden and elusive to these White school leaders.

Further distressing, some of the White school leaders declared racism was declining and “getting better with time”. Principal Chad stated, “I feel it is getting better. You could go find cases and then highlight those cases to make your overall case that racism is still an issue in the US, but obviously, we’ve come a long way.” Principal Dexter added, “I feel like if we didn’t make an issue about it, it wouldn’t exist.” This is a dangerous mindset for White school leaders to maintain. Racism is alive and well in America today and it is still “seen to systematically provide economic, political, psychological and social advantages for Whites at the expense of Blacks and others

people of color (Wellman, 1977, p. 37). However, these White school leaders are oblivious to it and therefore, it remains an unrelenting, unaddressed force within their school. If racism and its systematic prowess remain oblivious and unseen to the White school leaders across the United States, then systematic racial bias should be expected to survive and thrive.

The findings of this study suggest the systematic nature of racism remains elusive to these White school leaders and are in accord with much previous literature and research. Although, not a new issue, this study highlights the need for better instruction and training on race and racism for our White educators. The White school leader's level of knowledge and understanding about racism is simply inadequate and it does not afford them the ability to effectively recognize and attack racial inequities within their school systems. They do not have a sound opportunity to address racism and racial inequities in their school if they are unable to recognize them. As such, the status quo of White racism survives unrelenting and undisturbed. This is simply not an option if they are to expect equitable public school for all students. White school leaders must begin to better understand race and racism and better address these systematic racial issues if we are effectively address racial equity for all students.

### *Role of Race and the Principalship*

#### *Addressing racial issues and fighting for social justice?*

Recognizing and addressing issues of race is central to any social justice approach. Theoharis (2004), in his study of successful social justice leaders stated initially these leaders had to develop "their own consciousness, knowledge, and skills in

dealing with issues of race, leading and making connections between issues of race” (p. 1333). Thus, White principals fighting for racial equity and social justice must build their skills around addressing and discussing race and racism before they will be able to begin the enormous task of disrupting the status quo within their schools. However, the majority of the White school leader participants in this study were even reluctant to discuss and address racial issues.

Principal Alice was presented with an obvious racial situation and was amazed but chose to not respond and explained, “I acted like I didn’t hear him”. When asked how many times she had discussed race issues with other school leaders, she responded quickly, “Never” and “I think we’re afraid to talk about race. I think we’re afraid of offending each other”. In a later exchange she expressed her beliefs this way, “I’m not going to own all the racial tension, I’m not going to do it. That is a conscious decision I’ve made”. Thus, not only is she reluctant to address racial issues, she actually prefers to avoid them. This allows racially biased outcomes and racism at her campus to flourish. If race and racial issues are not confronted then they will continue to thrive unrelenting and undisturbed.

Principal Chad offered his reluctance to discuss race and racial issues this way, “I don’t believe that the district or our campus singles anybody out ... because of race or anything like that” and “we look on it more per kid ... the kid individually, rather than looking at it from an ethnicity standpoint”. Thus, the issues of race are discounted immediately. When asked if he would be willing to talk about how Black students are doing and how race plays a part in racial disparities he responded, “I don’t know about

how race plays a part in their achievement or lack of achievement either way.” His responses elicited no confidence in his desire to tackle racial issues or address race in anyway. He simply refused to address race at all. When asked about discussing racial issues with fellow principals he stated, “I don’t think really it is a race issue that we should be focusing on.” Principal Chad actually stated that race and racial issues are not what he and other principals “should be focusing on?” When asked if he ever discussed race or racial issues with anyone he simply retorted, “No”. As a result, his reluctance to address race and racial issues hinders his ability to properly affect racial bias and equity within his school.

These White school leaders are serving in a racially diverse school and in a racially diverse school district and are reluctant to discuss race with colleagues, fellow school leaders, staff member and community members alike. Further, they clearly believe race isn’t worthy of discussion and don’t readily desire to view or address racial situations when they present themselves. They have a strong disinclination and unwillingness to address racial issues and, as mentioned earlier, a yearning to ignore race altogether. Their reluctance to confront and address racial issues was conspicuous and its negatively affects their role as a White school leader seeking an equitable education for all students.

When the reluctance to address racial issues was probed further, the White school leaders posited that the resistance from fellow White educators, school administrators and parents were all factors. When asked why she was reluctant to discuss and address race and racial issues with her staff, Principal Alice stated, “I think we’re afraid to talk about



race. I think we're afraid of offending each other." Principal Beth recalled a recent discussion amongst colleagues and the resistance she witnessed.

We had an African-American presenter come in and was talking about African-American boys ... and he very clearly stated that there is an inequality in the way that African-Americans are taught, treated, etc... and I think that it offended their (White teachers) sensibilities that someone would call us on that.

She went to say that the discussion was offensive to the White teachers because it was like, "pulling a lot of scabs off of some open wounds" and "they were highly offended ... a lot of the White teachers were offended ." Thus, this White school leader had reluctance to discussing race further with her staff for risk of offending fellow White staff members. Principal Alice also posited resistance from her White supervisor as a deterrent to discussing and addressing racial issues. When discussing a meeting with her White supervisor and the possibility of discussing a racial issue with him she stated she couldn't, "because it would be accusatory ... I got to find the right ways to say it, where, it's not me accusing him unconsciously of making a decision based on race". She was, rightly or not, highly concerned about the resistance and even retaliation she might receive from her supervisor for discussing an obvious racial issue within her school district. She stated at the end of the interview, "I shouldn't have done this [research study] because if he heard my words I could really be in trouble, probably". Thus, her anxiety, worry and reluctance to discuss race and racial issues, even with the researcher, was conspicuous.

Finally, Principal Dexter expressed resistance from the community, other educators and colleagues as a cause for his reluctance to address and discuss racial issues and topics. When asked about discussing racial issues he replied, "I think I'm cautious

about who I'm talking to ... you don't want the wrong person to get the wrong impression" and "we've had our share of bad publicity in the district recently ... and I don't want any of that to be compounded by something ... I said or whatever. So you try to be cautious". He further explained his reticence this way, "I'm cautious and probably talk less about it (race) than I probably need to ... I'm very cautious in ... decisions I make and always thinking the decisions I make, how is perception going to come across for this, what will this do within the community". Thus, due to his concern and caution for the reaction of the parents and the community, he is reluctant to speak out about race and racial issues. His caution is code for his reluctance to address race and racial issues.

This resistance and reluctance coincide with previous research. In his study of successful social justice school leaders, Theoharis (2004) found that they also faced resistance from their staff, the community, and the families. In addition, "the way things were done", or the status quo, created a fierce commitment to maintaining unjust and inequitable programs, structures, and opportunities. Thus, the resistance weighed heavily upon the successful social justice school leaders and left them feeling isolated without much support (Theoharis, 2004).

Similarly, the White school leaders in this study felt the resistance from their staff, fellow White educators, the community, parents and even their White supervisors and this resistance helped to provide pressure and the reluctance necessary to maintain the status quo. Concern and caution for upsetting the status quo, offending White educators "sensibilities", and accusing White supervisors of conscious race-based decisions were all resisting factors hindering these White school leaders from discussion around racial

issues. Theoharis (2010) reminds, "(T)hese leaders described this resistance as "enormous," "never ceasing," and "often unbearable." (p. 339). Thus, this resistance is a hindrance that future White school leaders fighting for racial equity and social justice will need to confront and effectively manage if they are to ultimately be successful in their fight for a equitable education for all students. Again Theoharis (2007) warns, White school leaders and "principals seeking social justice do not fit the traditional mold, and their approaches are not always accepted by colleagues" (p. 339). Thus, White school leaders will face strong resistance from both inside and outside of the public school institution and therefore will need to have a highly evolved White racial identity, a strong understanding of Whiteness and the privileges its affords, and a keen eye for the pervasiveness of systematic racism to effectively confront racial issues. All of these skills will be needed and even then resistance and opposition will be fierce.

White school leaders will face obstacles and resistance when they address racial issues but once they begin to address these issues there is evidence of success. Research has documented school leaders successful efforts to affect change and address social justice issues within our public school system (see Carter, 2000; Eiler & Camacho, 2007; McGee, 2004; Schuerich & Skrla, 2003, Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2010, 2011). Highly racially identified, knowledgeable White school leaders can make a profound difference in their schools but as our current situation shows, there is no time to delay the start of this process. White school leaders must confront their own reluctance and the external resistance they face addressing racial issues before they can become successful social justice leaders.

The White school leaders in this study demonstrated reluctance to address racial issues and had difficulty attacking racial bias and racism. As stated earlier, they were also unable to fully recognize racism and did not demonstrate a profound knowledge of race or Whiteness. This lack of profound knowledge and understanding around race, Whiteness and racism coincides with a low level of White racial identity and White identity orientation. A low level of White racial identity and White identity orientation does not facilitate strong leadership or action on racial issues. In contrast, a real desire to confront racial issues and "truly tackle racism and oppression in its various forms" (Helms, 1993, p. 62) happens in the most advanced stage of White racial identity, autonomy and in the final White identity orientation, transformative. Therefore, a deeper discussion of the White racial identities and White identity orientations of the White school leaders in this study and previous research on White racial identities follows.

#### *White Racial Identity and Identity Orientation Development*

The recognition and knowledge of race and one's White race has been espoused as a pertinent first step to any future growth as an anti-racist educator (Howard, 1999). However, the findings from this study indicate that the White school leaders are not highly knowledgeable about race nor are they able to fully recognize Whiteness or racism. Thus, the White school leaders in this study indicated their White racial identity was early in phase one, the abandonment of racism, at the contact stage and similarly, indicated a nascent fundamentalist White identity orientation. A discussion of the findings of this study and the previous research of White racial identity (Helms, 1990, 1992, 1995, & 2005) and White identity orientation (Howard, 1999) are discussed next.

*White racial identity.*

In phase one, the abandonment of racism, the initial stage, contact, is described by attitudes of oblivion to the implications of race. Whites pay little attention to their racial identity (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997). Whites in this racial identity stage do not perceive any uniqueness in their racial classification and due to their racial unconsciousness, they do not recognize or acknowledge differences in the experiences of Whites and people of color.

Unfortunately, the majority of White principals in this study are in an early stage of White racial identity, contact. In the following exchange Principal Beth demonstrates her difficulty recognizing race and its uniqueness, “I really don’t even think that myself as being White ... for me it’s just a matter of skin color and I don’t think that I’m any different ... just because my skin is White”. When asked if she has ever thought about being White she stated, “I haven’t, not really”. Another White school leader responded, “not really, no” and “I don’t think of it(race) at all”. The White school leaders in this stage cannot and will not be able to appropriately address racial issues and White racism in their schools because it will be oblivious and “unconscious” to them. Without the ability to recognize race and Whiteness these White school leaders will not be effective in addressing the myriad of racial issues and manifestations of racism that presents itself unrelentingly.

In stage two, disintegration, Whites begin to become aware of racism and White privilege and attempt to start to make sense of the, sometimes dissonant, realities of race and racial diversity. They acknowledge differences in how Whites and people of color are

perceived, and are aware that a White racial classification affords a different, more privileged, status over other races. However, these White school leaders were unable to properly see White privileges and therefore had difficulty “making sense” of the differences and the advantages and disadvantages of race. Representative of the other White school leaders Principal Chad stated, “I wouldn't say that there's any advantage to any particular ethnicity” and another White school leader stated, “I don't think it (race) does matter”. Thus, White privilege and the acknowledgement of differences amongst races remained elusive to these White school leaders. “Without a higher level of White racial identity, these White principals will not have an ‘activist’ stance that seeks to end social inequities and surrender the privileges gained from racism” (Gushue & Constantine, 2007, p. 322). Rather, these White school leaders in their contact stage of White racial identity will continue to struggle just to understand and recognize race and racism.

Thus, there is a “compelling need for White people, particularly White educators in the United States, ... to look within ourselves and realign our deepest assumptions and perceptions regarding the racial markers that we carry” (Howard, 1999, p. 40). Without this readjustment and realignment, White school leaders will continue to lead schools and continue to produce the same racially biased student results they have in the past. These racially biased results from our racist public education system are simply unacceptable. White school leaders must confront systematic procedures and processes that produce these racially biased outcomes or they will sustain. However, in the first stage of White racial identity, simply recognizing race, their White race and Whiteness will be arduous.

Similar to White racial identity, White identity orientations (Howard, 1993, 1999) offers a parallel, yet different, view of these White school leaders racial development. In conjunction with the White school leaders demonstrated low level of White racial identity, this study's findings also indicate an early level of White identity orientation. To offer more clarity, the findings of this study and the existing White identity orientation research is subsequently discussed in greater detail.

*White identity orientation.*

Gary Howard's (1993, 1999) work on White identity orientations offers an analogous, yet alternate, view of racial identity for Whites. Similar to Helms, Howard's (1999) model identifies three distinct, semi-linear, orientations of White identity: fundamentalist, integrationist and transformationist. Not surprisingly, the White school leaders in this study indicated a nascent and beginning White identity orientation.

Similar to the contact stage of Helms' (1990) White Racial Identity Development model, the initial White identity orientation, fundamentalist, is distinguished by a disregard of Whiteness and a general lack of knowledge about race. The subsequent orientation, integrationist, is distinguished by an acceptance of racial differences and the initiation of the interrogation of Whiteness. Although integrationists have begun to interrogate Whiteness and acknowledge White dominance, they remain ambivalent in their conclusions and fail to grasp the significance of its continuing effects in social situations (Howard, 1999).

However, as previously discussed, the White principals in this study are still in the process of recognizing their White race and Whiteness. The lack of acknowledgement

of the advantages and privileges of their White skin and White race, their denial of Whiteness and their inability to acknowledge their complicity in racism are indicative of a fundamentalist White identity orientation. Principal Dexter expresses his denial of Whiteness this way when asked about the privileges his White race brings, “I don’t know that it’s an advantage” and “I don’t think it’s an advantage”. Principal Chad stated similarly, “No, I don’t believe so ... I wouldn’t say that there is any advantage to any ethnicity”. Representative of the other principals, Principal Chad and Principal Dexter are in denial of the benefits of their race. Their Whiteness is hidden. Fundamentalists are not able to attack racial issues and address racial inequities because they go unseen and undisturbed. Thus, their schools will continue to operate with policies and procedures that ensure the status quo’s survival and perpetuation.

This is regrettable because higher levels of White identity orientation have been shown to positively affect one’s beliefs and attitudes on race, racism and White privilege (Carter, 1990; Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Helms, 1990, 2005; Howard, 1990, 1999; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997). White principals cannot continue to reside in the fundamentalist orientations if they are to successfully address the racially biased educational gaps in our public education system. White integrationists become aware of the advantages of being White and the personal struggles students of color have experienced. However, these White school leaders were not able to view the advantages and thus were not able to recognize the struggles of their students of color either.

For Whites, “the road to a transformationist White orientation is neither straight nor easy...neither mapped nor well traveled. It is a journey fraught with ambiguity,



complexity and dissonance” (Howard, 1999, p. 115). Thus, the more quickly the White school leaders can get on the path to a higher White racial orientation the more expeditiously they can begin to appropriately attack and address racial issues in their schools. Like the White racial identity stage of autonomy, White transformationist “through their willingness to probe deeper terrain of racial identity, ...become self-reflective, authentic, and anti-racist in their understanding of Whiteness” (Howard, 1999, p. 106). In the transformationist orientation Whites are guided by respect and empathy and are advocates for marginalized people and are committed to social action.

However, the principals in this study demonstrated both a low level of White racial identity and an early White identity orientation. Thus, they did not show a commitment to social action nor a strong recognition of social justice. Nor did the White school leaders in this study display an anti-racist understanding of the White race and Whiteness. Their early levels of White identity orientation and White racial identity are hindering their abilities to effectively address the myriad of racial issues and the various manifestation of racism that presents themselves to White school leaders everyday. Thus, the relenting status quo will thrive and survive on their campuses. Racially biased outcomes go unchecked and students of color will continue to struggle at a rate that is simply unacceptable.

White principals must begin to better recognize and understand their race and Whiteness to move along the pathway to higher White racial identity and White identity orientation. Like the autonomy stage of White racial identity, the transformative White identity orientation is the goal for all White school leaders and White educators alike.

Transformationist have experienced a profound shift in their understanding of the world and themselves and “having changed themselves, they are passionate about educating other Whites and committed to working with colleagues from all racial groups to overcome the social arrangements of past and present dominance” (Howard, 1999, p.108). Further, White transformationist educators are committed to social action and the dismantling of White racism and Whiteness.

Like Howard (1999) declares, “it is important for each of us to understand our own position and level of awareness vis-a-vis the categories of race...it is important we become self-reflective regarding our White identity” (p. 84). Thus, it is important for White school leaders to start to acknowledge, recognize and evaluate their own race and their own level of White identity orientation. For most White school leaders and White educators, that means working in the early stages of White identity orientation (Howard, 1999). A first step in becoming a transformationist White leader or arriving in the autonomy stage of White racial identity, where social justice and anti-racist action can be best attempted, is to see race clearly and without bias and condemnation. Our White school leaders have much distance to travel before they can “stand up” and properly and effectively address race, racism and racial equity in their schools.

#### *Profound Lack of Training and Instruction around Race*

It is worth noting that the White school leaders in this study were unable to recall many courses, classes or workshops specifically on race and racism. There were mentions of multi-cultural classes and discussions on poverty that touched on race but nothing focused strictly on race and racism. These White school leaders were working in a highly

racially diverse school district but they indicated no training or instruction or even discussions on race or racism within their district. This lack of formal training and discussion around race has hindered their perceptions and knowledge and has done nothing to help them become more aware of their own White race. Principal Elle was fortunate to obtain extra training and knowledge about race and her White race but it took her pursuing her doctoral degree later in her career to receive it.

White school leaders will remain early in their White racial identity development unless they are instructed and challenged to contemplate their race, Whiteness and racism. Helms (1993) states that Whites need to have an experience that is significantly **discrepant** enough to have them question their privileged status as Whites in a society before they will progress through the second phase of White racial identity, non-racist identity. Thus, it is imperative that White school leaders have better opportunities to have more variant experiences with race and their White race. If the White school leaders are not exposed to and do not gather more information about the privileges and advantages of their White race, Whiteness and the systematic disadvantages for students of color in our public school system than we should expect them to remain right where they stand currently, within the status quo and oblivious.

The lack of training around race and racism was significant and profound. However, it is congruent with much previous research on the topic of race training and instruction in principal preparation programs. Most educational leadership programs do not address the discourse of race (Scheurich, 2002a), racial identity, cultural responsiveness or critical pedagogy (Brown, 2004; Laible, 2000). Additionally, programs

addressing social justice and equity and social justice are also very limited (see Brown, 2006; Capper et al., 2006; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Rusch, 2004). Thus, there is a need for White educators to address this problem and provide more knowledge to our present and future White school leaders in the area of race and racism. However, several ideas and suggestions for educators arose during the completion of this study. Based on the findings of this study a discussion of recommendations for future and present educators subsequently follows.

#### *Recommendations for Educators*

Through the examination of the perceptions White principals hold on race and racism this study found the White school leaders' knowledge around race and racism to be limited and limiting. Without the ability to understand race and recognize racism in all of its manifestation, these White school leaders can't properly and effectively address racial issues and racial equity in their schools. If they are to become effective educational leaders and fight for equity for all students, White school leaders must establish a method to garner a greater level of knowledge around race, their own White race and racism.

However, this study revealed the absence of any formal training or any specific instruction around race and racism for the White principals. Although these White principals had all received a Master's degree in educational administration from a college or university and were acting principals in a racially diverse district, they all had difficulty recalling a single course, workshop, or class dedicated to race or racism. The White school leaders indicated a general lack of desire within the world of education to

broach these topics. The concern of offending White educators and the reluctance of administrators to risk these discussions was evident.

Thus, it is imperative that educators, specifically White educators, find a way to learn and expand their knowledge about race and racism. Although, there was mention of multi-cultural courses and poverty based discussions, neither is adequate to address the significance of race. Further, neither focuses on racism and its systematic affects. White school leaders without an advanced level of understanding around race, their White race and racism should be expected to continue to foster the same results we endure today. Thus, in light of our current educational gaps, it is imperative that White principals find a way to become more enlightened and educated about race and racism.

A more developed knowledge and comfort with race and racism must be fostered in our White school leaders. Principal preparation programs must begin to weave race, racism and racial equity throughout the entirety of their principal preparation programs. One day of multi-cultural education or one class on the characteristics of students from poverty, while valuable, have not altered the course of racism nor have they significantly changed the situation for our students of color in the public education system today. Research has shown “that principal preparation programs can and should influence the learning of aspiring leaders on many aspects of the principalship, especially in the context of social identity and social justice” (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015, p. 227). However, to be most effective these principal preparation programs must offer rich opportunities to engage in issues of race, critical consciousness and social justice (Lightfoot, 2009).

There are principal preparation programs in Texas that are utilizing more critical race knowledge and social justice aspects within and throughout. The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University both employ a more critical race-focused approach to their principal preparation programs. At the University of Texas at Austin, the principal preparation program has an explicit social justice, anti-racist vision and mission that employs a critical race consciousness focus. This higher level of focus and critical race consciousness allows both the future principals and professors space to openly discuss and address race and racial issues in a more complex and dynamic way. Utilizing reflective practices around race and racial autobiographies to stimulate racial awareness, the principal preparation program has demonstrated an increased racial salience amongst its principal candidates (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). This greater racial salience and the “personal transformation” these future principals undertake allows them to critically discuss race and enhances their ability to understand how it affects their school leadership. Thus, these principal preparation programs strive to produce more principals and more White principals with a compelling sense of race, racism and their potentially debilitating affects. It is through programmatic focus and activities like these that future principals, especially future White principals, can begin to enter the education world and start to lead campuses that are attacking racial injustices and working for social justice.

However, the principal preparation programs in most universities and colleges in Texas and the United States are not grounded in social justice nor focused, programmatically, on race and racial equity. This dearth of universities and colleges adequately preparing principals for the ever-changing demographics of the United States

projects trepidation for our public school system and their abilities to resist and attack the systematic pervasiveness of racism and racial inequities within that system.

Likewise, teacher preparation programs must do the same. The earlier race and racism are investigated and discussed, the sooner educators, especially White educators, can begin on their path to a greater understanding of racial equity. The path to a higher level of White racial identity and orientation can be a long and tedious one for Whites. Thus, it behooves White educators to start on that journey as soon as possible. Teacher preparation programs can start the journey and do their part to help address these systematic, racially biased outcomes within the public education system as well.

Finally, Principal Elle showed great growth in her understanding of race and her White racial identity through her training and schooling at the doctoral level and that is encouraging. Principal Beth showed some growth in her racial identity and understanding in just 3 hours of discussion during this study. Further, racial autobiographies and self-reflective writing around race have also been shown to support and produce a greater racial awareness in prospective White school leaders (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Thus, many methods have shown positive results and indicate that there may be multiple methods and strategies that can be utilized to improve White school leaders critical consciousness and understandings of race, their White race and racism.

Therefore, practicing White principals and school systems across the nation need to develop and create processes to interject race instruction and knowledge into their professional lives. If a greater understanding of race and racism helps to facilitate greater

awareness of systematic racism and its affect, then it is important for acting White principals to acquire this new knowledge as soon as possible. The United States public education system can't wait for only newly trained White principals to address our racially biased systematic issues. The public school system, White school leader and educators alike must all take action now. There is no time to waste in the battle for social justice in our United States public education system.

Educators and practitioners have a role to play in the continued attack on racial inequities and racism within our public education system. Educational researchers have a role as well. A discussion of suggestions for future research follows.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

This study illuminated the perceptions selected White principals held about race and racism in an effort to provide new knowledge and insight in the struggle to find solutions to the systematic inequities of the public school system and to better address the persistent educational gaps. The findings of this study indicate White school leaders have limited knowledge of race and racism and therefore, do not see or thoroughly understand the manifestations of racism in the public school system. These results facilitate the need for more research around principals, race and racism. However, there is limited research on principal perceptions of race and racism and even less on the perceptions of White principals.

Principals and school leaders can make a difference in the lives of all students and their perceptions inform their ideals and decisions. Therefore, there is a need for additional research on the perceptions White school leaders hold about race and racism to



confirm or contrast the results of this study. This study found White school leader's knowledge and understanding of race and racism to be slight and in need of improvement. However, this was a study of only five White principals from one racially diverse district. Thus, there is a need to replicate this study with different White school leaders, in different school districts and in a different state. Further research on White principals' perceptions of race and racism could validate or challenge the findings of this study and provide more insight into these systematic issues.

In addition, this study examined the White principals perceptions of race and racism but it was not concerned with the performance or achievement of their students and their individual schools. Research examining the student's performance and racial equity of the campus and their White principal's perceptions of race and racism would add a layer of insight and knowledge. The comparison of the school and student performance and the White principal's perceptions on race and racism would help to examine the power and affects of the White principal's perceptions. For example, a study could be designed to answer whether or not or to what degree the perceptions of race and racism of White school leaders in racially diverse schools affect their student's performance. This would add to the research and knowledge we already have on student performance.

Next, since the interview stage of this study was conducted in the spring of 2014, it would be interesting to research the effects, if any, this research project had on these acting principals during the 2014-2015 school year and subsequent years. Did the discussions and interactions around race and racism induce any new behaviors or actions

from these White school leaders? Do these White school leaders perceive race differently now? Have they made any new efforts to address racial issues, racial equity and social justice? A follow-up study with these White school leaders would help answer these questions and would add to the body of research around White principals' perceptions of race and racism.

Similarly, a follow up study on an individual White principal from this study would also yield interesting knowledge. Principal Chad had the most constricted views of race, racism and the affects and reality of both. Conversely, Principal Elle had the most advanced views of race and racism. A study examining, comparing and contrasting their daily actions and behaviors with people of color, students of color and their willingness to address racial issues would yield interesting results. How do Principal Elle and Principal Chad manage to address race and racial issues on their campus on a daily basis? What do they do differently and how does it affect the students of color on their campuses? How is student achievement affected by their school leader's perceptions and beliefs of race and racism? A research study comparing these two principals would yield interesting data to interpret and utilize.

Moreover, throughout the length of the study, Principal Beth was a principal that showed some growth in her perceptions of race and racism. In just three one-hour discussions about race and racism Principal Beth's perceptions were able to change from very limited views of race and racism to a slightly more dynamic view and a basic understanding that racial equity is a systematic issue. She took small steps but they were initiated, from her account, by the interviews and discussion of the study. Thus, a

research study could be devised to evaluate what changes can be made with White school leaders' perceptions on race and racism at varying levels of instruction and discussion around race. Is 3 to 5 hours of discussion and instruction about race and Whiteness worthy to initiate positive change in a White school leader? How much "growth" can be achieved in a 3, 5, or 10-hour workshop? Can a White school leader develop a more advanced White racial identity and how long does it take to achieve results? More research and insight into these questions would produce intriguing results in the pursuit of more race conscious White school leaders.

Finally, since the literature is thin on the perceptions of White school leaders on race and racism there is a general need for more research and inquiry around them. Although the literature is rife with research around White teacher's perceptions of race, research focusing on White principals' perceptions of race and racism are not plentiful (See Theoharis, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Young & Liable, 2000). Thus, there is a fundamental need for more inquiry and investigation of White school leaders' perceptions of race, racial equity, racism and Whiteness. Studies and research on White school leaders can produce an extra level of difficulty as there is a perceived challenge to attract White school leaders to discuss and address White race, White racism and Whiteness. The literature is clear Whites are reluctant to address race and racial issues (see Aveling, 2007; Lopez, 2003; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntosh, 1989; Rains, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Young, 2011; Young & Liable, 2000). Thus, attracting participants can be difficult. However, the need and thirst for new knowledge about White school leaders supersedes these limitations and more research on these White school leaders is gravely needed in

our efforts to address racial equity in the public school system. White school leaders must begin to better recognize and address racial issues if they are to ever deliver a high quality, equitable education to all students. Fortunately, with more research and the more knowledge about White school leaders, our chances for success increase.

### *Conclusion – White Principals Please Stand Up!*

Five White principals from a large racially diverse school district were selected to participate in this research study. The perceptions of these White school leaders on race and racism were critically examined to better determine their subconscious belief systems. Utilizing critical theory as the theoretical underpinning of this study, the critical examination of these perceptions yielded the six following themes: 1.) The White principals utilized deficit thinking. 2.) The White principals employed racial erasure and colorblindness. 3.) The White principals did not recognize Whiteness. 4.) The White principals did not understand systematic and institutional racism. 5.) The White principals were reluctant to address racial issues. 6.) The White principals demonstrated a nascent level of White racial identity.

Though the results and findings were consistent for four of the White school leaders, the fifth White principal, Elle, was reliably diverse from the group. Principal Elle recently sought and received advanced training on race and racism in a doctoral program. Although, her “real White” childhood and homogeneous upbringing was similar the other principals, her current views and understanding of race, racism and social justice issues were advanced. Her White racial identity was altered by many life events but her formal,

targeted introduction and instruction on race was pivotal to her transformation into a burgeoning social justice leader. Her growth and development through targeted, race-based, racism laden discussions lends hope to the possibility of future White principal's ability to expand their own understanding about race.

White school leaders must first become more aware of race. Then they must begin to investigate and interrogate their own White race and the privileges and advantages conferred upon them because of their White race. This leads to a better understanding of Whiteness and a chance to better recognize and comprehend the power and breadth of systematic and institutional racism. Finally, they must be willing to address and prepared to fight for social justice. Racism and racial inequities manifest themselves in many forms and can be unrelenting. However, White school leaders who recognize and attack racism and the White hegemonic structures that afflict our public school system will have an advanced White racial identity and White identity orientation. Recognizing, confronting and attacking racist structures and addressing racial inequities within our public school system is exactly where we need all of our White school leaders to be. Thus, I request all current and future White school leaders to please stand up and recognize race because, race matters!

### *Significance*

This study makes a contribution to the field of educational administration and school leadership as it illuminated the perceptions White school leaders held of race and racism. First, the results of this study indicated that White school leaders have much to learn in the area of race and racism if we are to be successful in our attempts to provide

an equitable education for all students. Thus, it highlighted an area for improvement for our White school leaders and for public education as a whole. Next, this research study and its findings can be used to help review and re-examine school leader practice, principal preparation, and future research. Sharing the findings of this study can inform and assist both school leadership practice and principal preparation programs and hopefully provide fodder for future research studies. Moreover, this study reaffirms for White school leaders everywhere the importance of an advanced White racial identity. Since a higher level of White racial identity development allows for more socially-just White school leaders, this study serves as a sign or even warning that something must be done in light of the changing demographics in the United States, to improve and evolve existing and future White school leader's White racial identity development. Finally, I do not fully know what impact this study will have on the field of educational administration but I do hope that this small piece of research elicits a few new thoughts and ideas around White school leaders. Social justice does not happen by chance and history tells us that White school leaders have not actively or effectively addressed racial issues in the past. So it is my desire that educators and White school leaders alike gain some new knowledge in the pursuit of an equitable education for all students. The public school system in the United States needs all White school leaders to please stand up and recognize race.

## Appendix

Figure 3: Initial Interview Protocol

### Initial Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
 Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Notes: We will first confirm and discuss participation, consent form, ground rules of the study, confidentiality, anonymity and scheduling; then each participant will be given a personal reflective journal to use for note taking, questions, comments and self-reflection.

	Question/Prompt	Comments/Observations
<b>Personal Information and Employment Information</b>	Tell me about where were you born and where did you grow up/where are you from originally? - What type of town/area – Describe - Anything about you, you would like me to know, any interesting “fun facts”	
	Family description? Siblings? What are occupations of your father/mother?	
	Current job - Describe job and school - Racial composition of current school	
	How racially aware is the campus/district? Describe the level of racial equity? Issues?	
<b>Schooling</b>	Tell me how you did in school? How did teachers regard you? What were their expectations of you? - Favorite classes/subjects/teachers. Why?	
	Where did you go to college/university? Why did you choose to go there? What did you like most and least about the school(s)? Demographics?	
<b>Educational Role</b>	Why/How did you choose the profession of education? What subject(s)/grade levels did you teach?	
	Tell me about your process of getting into administration? - What do you feel is the role of a principal/leader? - How is it different/unique from teachers - Principals are most effective when/where they.....(do what, address what, work towards, focus on.	
	The role of education in the US? What is it all about, what should it do? Goals? Expectations? Accomplishments?	

<b>Educational Role</b>	(in light of those thoughts) Tell me how the public education is system doing, how would you evaluate/assess it?	
	What are some of the challenges educators have in the public school system today? What do you see as the greatest challenge(s) in education today?	
<b>Race Basics</b>	With which race do you assimilate the most? What race are you? - If none, why none, explore, investigate - Pres. Obama, Tiger Woods, GW Bush, Earl Campbell, Bill Cosby, Rick Perry....	
	If White, tell me when/how you first realized you were White? - What is your first “race-related” memory? - What do you think about race?	
<b>Racial Interactions &amp; Contact with POC</b>	Tell me about the people of color (POC) in your home town/schooling (K-12)? - How many? Frequency of contact? - General inclinations towards them?	
	Tell me about the POC at your college/university? - How many? Frequency of contact? - Positions? Professors, Administrators? - General inclinations towards them?	
	Tell me about the POC you work with? - How many? Frequency of contact? - Positions? - General inclinations towards POC? - Are you seeking more, less, about right?	
	Tell me about the friends of color in your social circle? - How many? Frequency of contact? - Are you seeking more, less, or about right?	
<b>Racism Basics</b>	There is much talk about race and racism in the media/US today; tell me your thoughts/feelings/beliefs about race and racism in the United States? How about the south, different, similar? How about your town/school, similar, different?	
<b>Misc.</b>	Any question(s) you would like to ask of me	

Conclusion Notes:

1. Review responses, member-check responses (continuously as needed)
2. Review study and timeline (follow-up interviews)
3. Encourage the use of the reflective journal between session
4. Thank you!



Figure 4: Second Interview Protocol

### Individual Interview Session #2 – Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
 Participants(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Notes: A review and follow-up of the previous initial interview will precede the start of this interview session; review timeline of the study, confidentiality/privacy rights, build rapport (ask about school, life, etc...); review/discuss personal journal

	Question/Prompt	Comments/Notes/Observations
Race, Whiteness, Privileges	What race are you? What color? Same thing? Who decides? Does it matter, do you care?	
	What does it mean to be White? - What is the White culture? - Have you ever thought about having White skin?	
	What advantages do you/we have being White? Any? - Do you think being White made any difference in your life?	
	Are there advantages in the United States to being Black or Hispanic? - Does it make a difference in their life outcomes? Situations? Have you ever thought about or wish you were Black or Latino(a)?	
	What are your thoughts about “race-based” admissions policies in college and universities and Affirmative Action laws? Raced-based Govt intervention? - Friends, colleagues, family	
Race, racial prejudice and racism	Tell me about racial prejudice? Where does racial prejudice stands in the US? What is it? Can you, I, see it, how often, when, where?	
	Tell me about any racially prejudice people you may know or have witnessed - How did you feel when this occurred? - Tell me how you responded to....	
	Tell me your thoughts about racism in the US? Does racism still exist? - What does it act/look like?	
	Describe what a racist looks like/acts like/sounds like?	

	Do you know any? If yes, tell me about them/it?	
<b>Systematic racism</b>	Can systems/institutions be racist? - If no, why not? - Not possible or just aren't? - If yes, which ones? How, why? - Follow-up questions on institutions mentioned	
	How about the US criminal justice system, is it racially biased or racist? Police? Housing? Employment? Any institutions? (have stats available)	
	Does your school district/campus have any biased outcomes? - If yes, what, why? - If no, inquire about school outcomes - Do you know any that do?	
<b>Race, racism, Contact</b>	Tell me how, when and with whom do you discuss race and race-related topics? - Have you ever?	
	Tell me how willing you are to speak up about race related topics? - When "others" aren't around? - With staff, family, friends, students?	
	<i>Tell me your thoughts about the following quote: "to the extent that Whites ignore their race and its privileges, we are racist" Bergeson (2001)</i>	
	Do you believe you are prejudice or racist in anyway(s)?	
	Any questions of me?	

Conclusion Notes:

1. Conduct member-checks, review responses as needed
2. Review study and timeline (next interview and/or focus group)
3. Encourage reflection journal – notes, thoughts, questions
4. Thanks!

Figure 5: Third and Final (part A) Interview Protocol

**3<sup>rd</sup> Interview Protocol, part A – Interview Protocol**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Participants(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: A review and follow-up of the previous initial interview will precede the start of this interview session; review timeline of the study, confidentiality/privacy rights, build rapport (ask about school, life, etc...); review/discuss personal journal

	Questions/Prompt	Comments/Observations
<b>School role, race basics</b>	Educational gaps in public schools abound – tell me about the people you know that are working to address race related issues in the public school system.	
	Are you willing to speak about race related issues and on behalf of those not present in school? -What issues do you feel most strongly? -Outside of school setting?	
	How might your race and racial influences impact your work as an educator/school leader?	
	Describe a recent “racial” situation/issue in your school or district. Who acted? Who is responsible to address (“mend”)?	
	What should a principal “do” about racial equity in their school? - What can be done? - Where to start? - Who? What?	
	What does social justice mean to you? - How and why is it important (may have to explain what it is)	
	What role should/does the principal play in pursuing social justice at your school?	
<b>White ID &amp; Race</b>	You’re a Dept. Chair and a colleague explains the achievements gaps, what is your reaction? How does race fit? Is it discussed? Offensive joke?	
	Towards the End: How do you feel about the privileges and advantages you are afforded as a White person in the US? Are there any you can think of?	
	Tell me your thoughts and feelings about racial equity and the: - Republican Party racially biased? - Police racially biased? Courts?	

	- Public School System in US, the south? - What does Obama's presidency mean for racial equity in US?	
<b>Systematic and Institutional Racism</b>	Individual vs. Systematic racism question from respondents replies	
	If you were the Sec. of Education, what would you do to address racial inequality and racial bias in our public school system?	
<b>Misc.</b>		
	Any questions of me?	

Conclusion Notes:

1. Conduct member-checks, review responses as needed
2. Review study and timeline (next interview and/or focus group)
3. Encourage reflection journal – notes, thoughts, questions
4. Thanks!

Figure 6: Third and Final, part B, Interview Protocol

**Interview Session 3 part B – Interview Protocol**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Participants(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: A review of the initial interview will start this session; next, a short summary of the performance of students of color in public schools will be read prior to the start of this session (educational gaps); review of timeline of study and ask about school, life, etc...

	<b>Question/Prompt</b>	<b>Comments/Notes/Observations</b>
<b>Educational Setting - Gaps in the Public School</b>	What are some of the challenges educators have in the public school system today?	
	Tell me about the greatest/most pressing issue/challenge we have in our public school system today?	
	(If not presented, do so) Why are racial achievement/educational gaps so persistent and prevalent? - NCLB? What role, thoughts? - If deficit thinking, blame the victim, etc.. presents, explore -	
	Math achievement gaps are particularly persistent and large; tell me your thoughts about why the mathematical “achievement gap” presents such a great challenge for educators and the public school system?	
	Comparatively, why are White kids doing so well and students of color performing so poorly?	
	Is anyone/thing to blame? Where does the fault lie? Who/what is most to blame?	
	Note: Explore any mention of curriculum, teachers, test bias or any other educational indicators/gaps?	

	Question/Prompt	Comment/Note/Observations
Principal & School Roles	(Change discussion a bit) In regards to achievement gaps and equitable educational outcomes, what role do the teacher's play?	
	Tell me about the principal's role?	
	For over 45 years these educational gaps have existed – what role, if any, does the school system itself play? - Communities, any other factors?	
Race Basics and Images	(In light of this discussion and to better understand situation) What does it mean to be a typical White student today? SOC, Black & Hispanic student? - What are the similarities/differences?	
	Are there advantages to being a White or Black or Latino student at your school?	
	If I went to your school, which student would I want to be, why?	
	Any topics, thoughts from your reflection journals?	
	Any questions of me?	

**Conclusion Notes:**

1. Conduct member-checks, review responses as needed
2. Review study and timeline (next interview and/or focus group)
3. Encourage reflection journal – note, observations, questions
4. Thanks!

Figure 7: Participant Recruitment Letter

**EMAIL for Recruitment of Participants**

Dear Principal,

I hope your Thanksgiving break was relaxing.

My name is Michael Caudill and I am a doctoral student at the University of Texas in Austin and a public school administrator with over 20+ years of experience in Texas public schools.

I am currently working on my dissertation research study and I have received permission from the University of Texas and your district to conduct my research in the district. I am writing you to determine if you would like to be part of the research study. Here are some details of the study for your consideration.

**Study Focus** – White principals’ perceptions of race and students of color.

**Methods** – The study consists of 3 individual interviews of approximately one-hour in length each. Additionally I will give you a reflective “study” journal to use during the study and we will briefly discuss them at the interviews. The total time commitment is approximately 4 hours. The interviews can take place at an appropriate mutually agreed upon location. We will schedule logistics together as needed and at your convenience.

**Timeline** – Interviews are scheduled to be completed December – February 2014; although I am hoping to complete the interviews by January 2014, if possible.

**Confidentiality and Privacy** – Your name, school and district will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used to identify you, your school and district throughout the transcripts and reporting. Further, to ensure accuracy of your responses and to assist in the development of the interview transcripts I will audio record each session. These recordings and transcripts will be kept by me in a locked filing cabinet at my house and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Your anonymity and that of the school and district will be strictly kept. In fact, the district will not be given the names of the participants either.

**Informed Consent Document** (attached) – Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not impact your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin, your school, or the district in which you are employed. If you would like to participate in this study please review the attached informed consent document and send me an email at [mcaudill1968@gmail.com](mailto:mcaudill1968@gmail.com) or call me at (254) 592-9321 to confirm interest. I will contact you thereafter to begin to plan and schedule the logistics of our initial interview.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, your participation and/or anything else you deem relevant. I really appreciate your considerations and I look forward to talking to you real soon.

Respectfully,

Michael Caudill  
University of Texas at Austin  
George I. Sanchez Building 3rd Floor, Suite 374  
1912 Speedway D5400  
Austin, TX 78712-1604

(Home)  
937 E 54<sup>th</sup> St  
Austin, Texas 78751  
(254)-592-9321 (c)

Figure 7: Participant Consent Letter

IRB USE ONLY

Study Number: 2012-08-0041

Approval Date: 11/7/2013

Expires: 11/7/2014

### **Consent for Participation in Dissertation Research Project**

**Title:** White Principals' Perceptions of Race and Students of Color

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The researcher, Michael K. Caudill, will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You have been asked to participate in a research study about the perceptions White principals hold about race and students of color. The purpose of this study is to examine White principal's perceptions on race and student of color in order to better understand the current status quo and to help illuminate areas for improvement as White principals continue to work with an increasingly diverse population. Further, this examination of the White principal's perceptions will help to inform principal training programs.

#### **What will you be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete an initial interview with the researcher (1-1.5 hrs)
- Complete 1 follow-up interview with the researcher (1-1.5hrs)
- Complete summative interview with researcher (1-1.5 hrs)
- Total time commitment of 4-6 hours

The interviews will be audio recorded.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

Risks for participating in the study are expected to be no greater than everyday life.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this study; however, the possible benefit of participation is a better understanding of race and racism.

#### **Do you have to participate?**

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate please contact Michael K. Caudill, via email at [mcaudill1968@gmail.com](mailto:mcaudill1968@gmail.com), or phone at (254) 592-9321 (c).

#### **Will there be any compensation?**

You will receive a gift certificate valued at \$25.



**What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?**

Study participants will remain anonymous and participant's names will not be used in the study. Further, all school district and school names will also be anonymous. Aliases will be used for the district name, the school names and the participant's names. Finally, all electronic and paper records, including this consent form, will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. The interviews will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy and to assist with the transcriptions. All identifiable information will be redacted during the transcription process. The recordings and transcriptions will be securely stored in a locking filing cabinet at the researcher's home in Austin and only the researcher will have access to these records. Recordings and transcripts will be kept for the entirety of the research project. Recording and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research project.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher **Michael K. Caudill** at **254-592-9321** or send an email to [mcaudill1968@gmail.com](mailto:mcaudill1968@gmail.com) for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is **2012-08-0041**.

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

**Participation**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. Refusal to participate or deciding to discontinue participation at any time will not involve penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate will not impact your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin, the school, or the district in which you are employed. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this study, please inform the researcher verbally before the start of the interview.

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